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THE WORK OF LIONEL BRITTON

PhD (Literature)

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is the first long study of the forgotten novelist and playwright Lionel Britton, whose creative works were all published in the 1930s. Throughout, the emphasis is on his only published novel, the very long and experimental *Hunger and Love* (1931). The Lionel Britton Collection at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, U. S. A., along with many unpublished materials of Britton's, holds former states of the novel, and I use a large amount of this material in my thesis; I suggest reasons why the content of the typescripts was gradually changed from the 1920s to 1930. Another vital issue is Britton's status as a working-class author, and it is my contention that *Hunger and Love* is an important working-class novel, although it has been almost totally neglected by the critics recovering this sub-genre. My thesis also addresses modernism in working-class fiction, a subject which has all too often been ignored by the almost automatic foregrounding of realism, and is a strong feature of *Hunger and Love*. Following this, my thesis broadens out to cover political minorities represented as outsiders in literature, and deals with the unmarried woman, the homosexual and the non-white, comparing them with the working-class protagonist in *Hunger and Love*. The concluding chapter involves the utopias and dystopias of minority groups, with special reference to Britton's *Brain* (1930) and *Spacetime Inn* (1932), which as plays are very unusual to the science fiction genre.

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INTRODUCTION

A. The Plan of the Thesis

Over the previous thirty years there have been a number of attempts to recover from oblivion the literature written by the working classes, an area that has been largely submerged under the literature of the dominant classes; in general, this interest has concentrated on the inter-war years, a period when working-class literature was in considerable evidence. The recovery has placed some emphasis on works by authors other than the few well-known ones in the working-class 'canon' because a much larger body of working-class literature exists which had hitherto remained largely unknown.

However, a significant omission from this ambitious recovery project is the novelist and playwright Lionel Britton, who if mentioned at all has been so mainly as a footnote to a general critical work or even to reject his inclusion at all in this literature. One of the aims of this thesis is to draw attention to this omission, and to demonstrate that Britton deserves recognition for his contribution to working-class literature. My thesis also deals with the little-recognised phenomenon of modernist techniques in working-class literature, and more generally with Britton's relation to the literature of alienation of the inter-war years from the viewpoint of certain groups of outsiders, and with his vision of an escape from this state of alienation. Throughout, my emphasis is on Britton's seven-hundred-page *Hunger and Love* (1931), his only published novel: although he also published the plays *Brain* (1930), *Spacetime Inn* (1932) and *Animal Ideas* (1935), his central argument is contained in the novel, and his first two plays are illustrations evolving from this argument, or — in the case of *Animal Ideas*, about which I have very little to say in the thesis — a

simpler re-statement of it.¹ Also, I refer throughout the thesis to many manuscripts and obscure published articles, a number of which were written by Britton himself, which are held at the Lionel Britton Collection at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, an invaluable source which I exploit throughout this thesis.²

I divide my Introduction into two sections because together with this plan, some biographical details about Lionel Britton are necessary as almost nothing has been published about his life, or at least the little that has been published is mainly hidden in newspapers or often obscure magazines from the 1930s. In the second part of my Introduction, as well as using information gathered from the LBC, I make use of material collected from such sources as the International Genealogical Index, census returns, trade directories, and birth, marriage and death certificates. I place some emphasis on the details of Britton's family in the nineteenth century because in a number of ways these help to shed light on his later development, at the same time as they provide a backcloth to *Hunger and Love*: the novel has strong autobiographical elements. Other details of Britton's later life also help to explain the reasons why he disappeared so quickly from public view.

In the first part of Chapter 1, 'Lionel Britton and the Critics', I give a short synopsis of the novel in order to make this and ensuing chapters more comprehensible, and in the second I examine the negative, mixed and positive critical reactions to Britton's work, which largely consist of reviews of *Hunger and Love* in the early 1930s: as there has been virtually no critical work on Britton in recent years, most of the quoted material in this chapter is from newspapers and magazines from the first half of the 1930s; most of that material again comes from the LBC.

¹ Lionel Britton, *Hunger and Love* (London: Putnam, 1931); Lionel Britton, *Brain: A Play of the Whole Earth* (London: Putnam, 1930); Lionel Britton, *Spacetime Inn: A Play* (London: Putnam, 1932); Lionel Britton, *Animal Ideas: A Dramatic Symphony of the Human in the Universe* (London: Putnam, 1935).

² Hereafter all references to this collection are abbreviated to 'LBC'.

I make particular use of my findings at the LBC in Chapter 2, 'What Lionel Britton Is Up To': the title refers to one of the chapters in *Hunger and Love* concerning evolution, and my own chapter concerns the evolution of Britton's book. Britton worked on his novel for several years, and an early typescript reveals the differences between this draft and the final copy, of which I give a number of examples. Of interest are the pencilled emendations Britton made to the typescript, because they reveal far more than the expected corrections of typographical errors or other inconsistencies: much more importantly, they facilitate an understanding of his artistic, aesthetic and political intentions. Also of interest to the development of Britton's work is his attitude to censorship, and the problems it brought not only with publishers, but also the difficulties he experienced when wishing to stage his work; self-censorship is also relevant here.

In Chapter 3, 'Lionel Britton's Relation to Working-Class Fiction', I begin by giving a brief overview of working-class fiction from the Chartist period to the end of the inter-war years, and then continue by assessing how much recent critical work has been written specifically on inter-war working-class literature, which is almost non-existent in the case of Britton. My main aim is to establish the relationship that Britton's work has with working-class writers of the inter-war years; I analyse several working-class novels written by members of the working classes from the point of view of certain common preoccupations of this literature, continually drawing comparisons and contrasts between these novels and *Hunger and Love*. My chosen writers are all working-class authors with strong interests in the working classes as distinct from non-working class authors merely sympathetic to the working classes, and my chosen novels are mainly ones that have not previously received a great deal of critical attention.

I entitle Chapter 4 'Outsider Modernism' because it is an expression which I find especially appropriate to what a number of working-class authors were attempting to say beyond the realist model: although realism is generally assumed to be the natural medium

through which working-class authors express themselves, the true picture is a little more complicated than this. I begin by defining modernism and looking at its causes and manifestations, and then continue by examining the charges that it was elitist or bourgeois. I interpret 'outsider modernism' as a style of writing belonging to marginalized groups of writers, specifically the working classes in this chapter, and I explain the differences between this and mainstream modernism, analysing several passages of examples of outsider modernism in different writers, highlighting where appropriate their similarities to Britton's novel. Finally, I briefly detail some of the realist techniques used in *Hunger and Love*, the recording of the minutiae of Arthur's world, which I then contrast by giving several much more detailed examples of outsider modernist techniques in *Hunger and Love*, which probe the workings of Arthur's mind. My main intention in this chapter is to establish that there is a continuation of modernist techniques in the working-class writing of the late 1920s and early 1930s, and which uses a different aesthetic from that of mainstream modernism. It links logically with the following chapter because outsider modernism is often an expression of alienation.

In my 'Alienation and Escape' chapter I again examine a number of texts and again draw analogies with a number of episodes in *Hunger and Love*. The difference is that in this chapter I am extending the analogy to incorporate authors not only from the working classes, but also from writers representing other dispossessed or disadvantaged groups of people. Alienation of some form affects all of these groups, and in order to shed more light on this, beginning with a definition of atheistic existentialism, I apply key atheistic existentialist concepts to several examples of the British literature of alienation during the inter-war period: existentialism, as I explain below, appears to have readier links to the general literature of alienation than any other philosophy. After analysing the books written by various authors, I then give several examples of alienation in *Hunger and Love*,

all the time relating it to Sartrean existentialism. I conclude by stating that the novel is pointing towards an ideal society.

‘Past and Future Perfect’ is my final chapter. After defining the key terms ‘science fiction’ and ‘utopia’ and ‘dystopia’, in the early part of this chapter I address the specifically utopian and dystopian elements in Britton’s science fiction plays *Brain* and *Spacetime Inn*. I then briefly discuss the science fiction (a very unusual genre in working-class literature) in two of Grassie Gibbon’s novels and also Gibbon’s and Britton’s anarchism, followed by both authors’ preoccupation with the theme of nudity as an expression of freedom and truth, before broadening the chapter out to examine some utopias in writers from other minority groups, particularly (although not exclusively) in the genre of science fiction.

An Appendix illustrates the difference between the chapter titles in the different states of the novel.

INTRODUCTION

B. Lionel Britton — A Brief Biography

As mentioned above, scarcely any biographical information about Lionel Britton is readily available, and since the mid-1930s his name has been almost forgotten.

Information about Britton's family background, though, is helpful to gain an impression of the formation of his ideas, particularly the importance of literature and foreign languages to him, and the reasons for his hatred of capitalism, religion, the law and institutions in general. The details of Britton's life after the publication of his last imaginative work in 1935 are also an indication of why he disappeared from the public eye.

Lionel Erskine Nimmo Britton had far from humble beginnings. At his birth on 4 November 1887 his paternal grandfather, John James Britton, was a solicitor practising in the small Warwickshire market town of Alcester and his father, Richard Waddams Nimmo Britton, had very recently passed his intermediate examinations to be a solicitor and was now practising in the family business — Britton & Son — in the nearby village of Astwood Bank, where he lived with his family.³ Lionel's maternal grandfather, Samuel Thomas, was for some time the representative in France of Samuel Thomas & Sons, manufacturers of needles and fish-hooks in Redditch; this business was founded by Samuel's father — also named Samuel — who lived in a large house in front of his extensive British Needle Mills until his death in 1878.⁴ It was one of the largest businesses in the town, with one hundred and twenty-two employees at the time of the 1871 census. By the 1881 census, Henry Thomas, a younger son of Samuel Thomas senior, appears to have taken over the greater part, if not all, of the family business. By this time Samuel

³ Birth certificate, Lionel Britton, Feckenham, registration district of Bromsgrove, Worcestershire and Warwickshire, 4 November 1887; 'The Law Society', *Times*, 24 November 1883, p. 12.

⁴ Death certificate, Samuel Thomas, registration district of Tardebigg, Worcestershire, 6 September 1878.

Thomas junior had returned to England on a permanent basis, and he too was a needle manufacturer, employing just twelve people.

Lionel's mother, Irza Vivian Geraldine, was born in 1866 and had met Richard at Kings Coughton, in a former farmhouse near Alcester where Richard lived with his father and the rest of the family; Irza was a fifteen-year-old poetry enthusiast who had initially gone to the house to visit John James Britton, a 'real live poet' who had earned a minor reputation locally, and who later published a novel.⁵ Irza and Richard married in 1885 and moved to Astwood Bank, where Ivy was born the following year and Lionel the year after.⁶ There is only one listing of Britton & Son at Astwood Bank in Kelly's Directories for that period: early in 1888, the company went into bankruptcy.⁷

Never fully qualified as a solicitor, Richard — who had previously worked as a teaching assistant and was given to writing philosophical musings by no means entirely different from those of his mature son Lionel — probably did not enjoy the legal profession. On his bankruptcy, he initially tried to find work again as a teaching assistant in England, although the family very soon moved to Paris, where Richard had found work as a managing clerk in a legal firm, and where Lionel's brother Percy was born.⁸ France and the French language run throughout the Britton and the Thomas families: Samuel Thomas junior had spent a number of years in France, where at least six of his children, including Lionel's mother, were born; both of Samuel's wives were French, and both of Lionel's

⁵ Irza Britton, letter to Richard Britton, [n. d.], LBC, Box 2, Folder 29; John James Britton, *Carrélla: Lyrics, Lays, and Sympathies* (London: Bennett, 1867); John James Britton, *The Lay of the Lady Ida: And Other Poems* (London: Remington, 1883); John James Britton, *Flight* (London: Trischler, 1890).

⁶ Marriage certificate, Richard Waddams Nimmo Britton and Irza Vivian Geraldine Thomas, Birmingham Register Office, registration district Birmingham, Warwickshire, 17 August 1885.

⁷ G. Edward Saville, *King's Coughton: A Warwickshire Hamlet* (King's Coughton: The author, 1973).

⁸ Thomas Perkins, letter of reference, 13 February 1888, LBC, Box 6, Folder 1; John Mourilyan, letter of reference, 15 March 1890, LBC, Box 6, Folder 1.

parents spoke the language fluently. This strong French connection must to some extent explain Lionel's fluency in the language, and is no doubt also indicative of the facility with which he later learned so many others: his friend Herbert Marshall claimed that Britton was fluent in over twenty different languages.⁹

However, Richard's employment in France lasted only a short time, and the Brittons then moved to the Bournemouth area, where Richard again worked unsuccessfully as a solicitor, and where the family income was supplemented by Irza working as a boarding house keeper. A fourth child, Cyril, was born in 1891, and by the end of the following year the couple had significant debts. In 1894, when Lionel was seven, Richard died of tuberculosis.¹⁰ Irza, who already had at least one suitor, remained in the area and married a gunner in the Royal Navy in 1897, although no other details of this marriage appear to have survived, and she was later to change her name back to Britton.¹¹

Lionel, Ivy, Percy and Cyril all moved to Redditch to live with their maternal grandparents, where their grandfather was then a traveller in a fishing tackle business. According to Lionel's own account, he excelled at school and soon learned all that they could teach him. It seems evident that he showed some of the rebelliousness that would later be a notable feature of his character: he already hated religious instruction, and was excused music lessons because he thought them 'silly'.¹² By 1901 Ivy was still at school at the age of nearly fifteen, but her younger brother Lionel was almost certainly in London by this time. His grandparents had presumably not wanted, or perhaps had not had the means

⁹ Anonymous, 'Forgotten Genius Ends his Days at Margate', *Isle of Thanet Gazette*, 29 January 1971, [n. pg.].

¹⁰ Death certificate, Richard Waddams Nimmo Britton, registration district of Christchurch, Southamptonshire, 1 December 1894.

¹¹ Marriage certificate, Francis le Breton and Irza Vivien Geraldine Britton, Portsmouth Register Office, registration district of Portsmouth, Portsmouthshire, 13 October 1897.

¹² Lionel Britton, 'Lionel Britton', typescript, [n. d.], p. [1], LBC, Box 6, Folder 1.

for, him to continue his education. For a brief period he lodged elsewhere in Redditch, later informing the *Daily News and Westminster Gazette* that his first job was ‘sandpapering fishing rods’.¹³ After running away and spending a few days as an office boy in Birmingham, Britton moved to London, and from this point his work life and intellectual life become very similar to that of Arthur Phelps in *Hunger and Love*.

In London, Britton found work as an errand boy at a grocer’s in Theobald’s Road, although he was dismissed from there for reasons unknown. He next found more errand work with an educational bookseller, the University Book Co. on Southampton Row, which according to Britton was the main catalyst to his intellectual curiosity, where he secretly read all he could in the firm’s time, which was also when he discovered ‘the penny-dump on the book-barrows on Farringdon Road’, ‘a mine of mind for empty pockets’.¹⁴ Britton worked at the shop for about six years, when he voluntarily left to work as a shop assistant for bookseller A. H. Mayhew (on whom Sarner in *Hunger and Love* is probably based) in Charing Cross Road for nearly two years; Mayhew found him ‘honest and industrious’ and ‘parted with him with regret’.¹⁵

Britton appears not to have mentioned World War I in newspaper or magazine articles or surviving letters, although the vicious propaganda machine in the novel, where the narrator tells of Phelps being urged by almost everyone around him into joining the war, seems to be comment enough on Britton’s experience of it: in an obituary, Raymond Douglas

¹³ Anonymous, ‘Young Playwright’s Romance: Work in Factory at Age of 13; Fame at 30: Mr. Shaw’s “Find”’, *Daily News and Westminster Gazette*, 18 March 1930, [no page], LBC, Box 12, Folder 11. (Hereafter, all references to unknown page numbers are referred to as ‘n. pg’.)

¹⁴ Lionel Britton, ‘Lionel Britton’, unpublished handwritten notes, [c. 1960s], p. 3, LBC, Box 1, Folder 1.

¹⁵ A. H. Mayhew, letter of reference to Irza Britton about Lionel Britton, 18 November 1918, LBC, Box 2, Folder 2.

reveals that Britton was attacked by a patriotic mob for not enlisting, and was imprisoned as a conscientious objector for about eighteen months.¹⁶

As early as 1917, Britton started to learn Russian and applied for Russian citizenship, although his application was disallowed by the Soviet ambassador. Then in the early 1920s he found a more remunerative post with the Incorporated Society of British Advertisers, where he worked for about six years, latterly as Assistant General Secretary. In his letter of reference in 1929, the General Secretary describes Britton as ‘an independent thinker, cautious and meditative, yet courageous in the expression of his opinions’, and who was also ‘a gifted linguist [whose] translation of the lesser European languages has frequently been of value to us’.¹⁷

For several years before this Britton had been working on his huge novel *Hunger and Love*, although he had disagreed with publishers because he refused to allow any cuts to be made to the content. It is a measure of his self-confidence and his powers of persuasion that he secured Bertrand Russell’s five-page Introduction to the novel, and that Constant Huntington of Putnam not only did not insist that he make cuts, but also allowed him to write the final amendments to it more or less as he wished.

The influence of the cinema on Britton’s writing is briefly mentioned in a chapter below, as film was of great interest to him: he was chairman of the experimental London Film Guild in the late 1920s, which had its studio in the same building as Foyle’s bookshop on Charing Cross Road. This voluntary organization was largely unsuccessful, only producing a small number of mainly critically unsuccessful shorts; Britton never directed a film, although he was responsible for some montage work.¹⁸ The secretary of the Guild was

¹⁶ Raymond Douglas, ‘Lionel Britton’, *Humanist*, May 1971, pp. 151–52.

¹⁷ Alfred H. Angus, letter of reference about Lionel Britton, 4 September 1929, LBC, Box 2, Folder 2.

¹⁸ The Film Guild of London, newsletter, [n. d.], LBC, Box 6, ‘other programs, newsletters’.

Herbert Marshall, who later moved to Russia for a number of years as a student of Eisenstein's.

By the time Britton left his advertising job in favour of writing, his mother Irza was living with him in a flat in Marylebone, in Saville Street, which was later incorporated into Hanson Street. And by the late 1920s Britton had also met Sinead Acheson, a woman in the legal profession who was to be his devoted friend for the rest of his life, and with whom he appears to have lived intermittently during the 1930s and 1940s.

Britton also had a strong interest in the theatre over many years and frequently attended performances; when he was a teenager, he had been a supernumerary at Her Majesty's Theatre under Sir Herbert Tree, and wrote his first play — 'Fang; or, the Reluctant Employee' — during this period.¹⁹ Before *Hunger and Love* was finally published, Britton had also written at least a first draft of his three published plays, and it is an indication of his strong powers of persuasion that the play would possibly not have been published without the assistance of Bernard Shaw, into whose hands he contrived to thrust a copy; Shaw passed it on to Sir Barry Jackson, which the press reported with great enthusiasm. *Brain* was published in May 1930, very shortly after its first and only performance, which was by the Masses Stage and Film Guild at the Savoy Theatre. *Brain* ensured that Britton was already relatively well known when *Hunger and Love* was published the following February, and after this his short-lived fame began in earnest and he was in great demand for a few brief years. He was asked to give a number of talks, to open theatres, he became the drama critic for the *New Clarion*, and established Left Theatre with André van Gyseghem and several others. There were many articles about him in newspapers and magazines, and a great deal of attention was also given to his second play, *Spacetime Inn*, for example: the blurb on the dust jacket speaks of 'the play which was read at the House

¹⁹ *Animal Ideas*, rear flap; Rebecca Gorski, 'Biographical Sketch', LBC.

of Commons — the only occasion in the history of any Parliament that such a thing has ever happened'.²⁰ Britton's M. P. friend John Smith Clarke had made the occasion possible, but both the blurb and the headlines are slightly misleading: although Britton himself certainly read his play before a group of M. P.s, the session was only held in a House of Commons committee room.²¹ Critically, the play was better received than *Brain*, although it was performed for four nights only at the Arts Theatre in London, and once by the Hostel Players in Hoddeson the following year. (For this second performance, the play also attracted a great deal of publicity — much of it pictorial — because Bernard Shaw gave one of his old Norfolk jackets to his namesake in the play.)

There were many caricatures of Britton in the newspapers and magazines of the day because he was quite an unusual figure for the time. Shaw had called him a 'wild young man' and Arnold Bennett had thought that he looked as though he had just come from the French Riviera: he had a shock of wiry hair which stood up almost perpendicular to his head and which he rather amateurishly cut himself, and he always wore an open-neck shirt, usually with light trousers or shorts and plimsolls; he was teetotal and did not smoke.

Britton had been anticipating a visit to Russia for some years, and as the initial excitement of his success eased off considerably, he went there in July 1935 at the expense of the International Union of Revolutionary Writers. Five years previously, the working-class writer Harold Heslop had stayed there for the same amount of time as Britton: three months.²² The two writers' impressions of the country have many similarities — Heslop was shocked by the poverty he saw, by his guide's ignorance of Russian culture, and bewildered by the consternation which his desire to see Zamyatin caused; after attending a

²⁰ *Spacetime Inn*, front flap.

²¹ Hannen Swaffer, 'Play to Be Read in Commons: Whole Action in Flash: Only Clever M. P.s Will Know What It's about!', [*Daily Express*], [c. 1932], [n. pg.], LBC, Box 12, Folder 10.

²² Harold Heslop, *Out of the Old Earth* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1994).

show trial, he called himself ‘a stranger in a world beyond my own belief’.²³

Britton’s frequent letters to Acheson express his disgust with the country. He was also alarmed by the poverty, exasperated by the queues and what he saw as the ignorance of the Russian people, as well as the fact that they would not answer his probing questions or allow him to explore his surroundings unescorted; above all, perhaps, he thought that his belief in co-operation as opposed to competition was not being practised in Russia: he believed that food and other shortages were caused by the government channelling money into the defence budget. What he saw forced him to see the United Kingdom as more socialist than Russia; he still thought that Russian communism would eventually succeed in its goals, but thought that the gradualism of the British Labour Party was better suited to the country’s progress than the Communist Party of Great Britain.²⁴ He returned by boat in October; Irza had become used to having more space, and most of Britton’s belongings had been moved to Acheson’s house.

Britton had awoken from his utopian dream to find a nightmare both in Russia and, more personally, at home. Putnam, having made only a modest profit from *Hunger and Love* (less than £100 after 10,000 sales and an expensive promotion campaign) and losses with *Brain* and *Spacetime Inn*, had already refused to give more than a perfunctory promotion to *Animal Ideas*. Britton had delayed his visit to Russia because the play was due to be published in the United Kingdom, but it proved to be a disaster: it was never performed (except by Britton himself at various readings), sales were very low, and it was largely

²³ *Out of the Old Earth*, p. 242.

²⁴ In spite of this conclusion, Britton had little interest in party politics, and it is evident from *Hunger and Love* that a form of anarchism is being advocated; it is no coincidence that anarchist sympathiser Bertrand Russell wrote a five-page Introduction to the novel, or that anarchist periodicals such as *Freedom* (quoted in Chapter 1) welcomed Britton’s work. I comment on Britton’s and Grassie Gibbon’s anarchism in Chapter 6.

ignored critically. In a revealing fourteen-page letter to Herbert Marshall, he called his experience ‘the snuff-out’: he was facing ruin as a writer and had little money left.²⁵

Britton escaped from London to take part in a socialist project at ‘Netherwood’ in Hastings, which was perhaps chosen because of its connection with the working-class writer Robert Tressell. In the second half of the 1930s, Netherwood was a large run-down property which had been bought by the actor and playwright E. C. Vernon Symonds to convert into a left-wing guest house that was intended as a haven for socialist meetings and trade union conferences among other things. Britton received free board and lodging there in return for manual work — mainly gardening and reconstructing the swimming pool — and was eking out the remainder of his advance for the Russian edition of *Hunger and Love*, although he hated almost everything about Netherwood.

During his stay in Hastings Britton was writing the play ‘Du Barry’, although it was never published and never performed. He later wrote several more plays and a novel, philosophical works, and dramatized several novels, such as *The Pickwick Papers*, *Barchester Towers*, Gwyn Jones’s *Times Like These* and three works by J. Jefferson Farjeon. But apart from a performance of ‘Mr Pickwick’ at Rugby and two translations of rather obscure Russian writers in the 1940s, Britton’s career in the theatre and in print was at an end.²⁶

Consequently, although he remained a committed writer, Britton was by economic necessity forced to find other means of survival, which led to an itinerant lifestyle. He taught from time to time, gave play readings throughout the country, and synchronized English dialogue to Russian films. And there was also another source of income: Acheson

²⁵ Lionel Britton, letter to Herbert Marshall, 20 May 1936, p. [7], LBC, Box 2, Folder 13.

²⁶ V[assili Grigor’evich] Yan[chevetsky], *Jenghiz-Khan: A Tale of 13th Century Asia*, trans. by Lionel Erskine Britton (London: Hutchinson International Authors, [1945]); N. Teleshov, *A Writer Remembers: Reminiscences*, trans. by Lionel Erskine Britton (London: Hutchinson, [1946]).

had bought a second-hand boat — known as ‘Spacetime Inn’, or simply ‘Spacetime’ — which she kept on the Thames and followed Irza’s suggestion to rent it out, with Britton collecting the proceeds from customers. He lived on the boat, in boathouses, or simply by the riverside, from about 1937 to 1944, although not continuously. And towards the end of the 1940s he was living with his mother again, now at Park House, a leasehold property at 66 Tufnell Park Road. In a draft application for a grant from the Civil List fund in 1951, he gave his income as ‘Between £70 and £80 per annum’.²⁷

In 1954 Britton suffered multiple injuries in a car accident from which he was very fortunate to survive; however, he received an undisclosed sum in compensation, with which he hoped to publish his work and ‘be independent of publishers’ readers’.²⁸ Britton was developing an obsession: he had amplified Bernard Shaw’s (possibly unfinished) play *Why She Would Not*, and for the rest of his life was concerned with the Society of Authors’s refusal to allow the simultaneous publication of both Shaw’s fragment and Britton’s ending. He kept scrapbooks of newspaper cuttings about the society along with its financial details, and biographical details of the committee members. And he was directly or indirectly supported by several prominent writers in opposition to the society’s exclusivity, including Bertrand Russell, who remarked of the society’s attitude to Britton’s writing: ‘If the principle became established that nothing should be published unless it aroused admiration in a number of elderly big-wigs, the result would be a disastrous censorship.’²⁹ These were encouraging words, although they can only have fed the obsession: in 1964, Britton sent a two-hundred-and-eighty-five-paragraph dossier to the

²⁷ Lionel Britton, draft application for Civil List grant, 4 January 1951, LBC, Box 13, Folder 13.

²⁸ Lionel Britton, letter to Bertrand Russell, 28 November 1955, in the possession of Harry Berberian (hereafter ‘HB’).

²⁹ Bertrand Russell, letter to Lionel Britton, 20 March 1956, HB.

Director of Public Prosecutions alleging fraudulent activities on the part of the Society of Authors. Nothing was ever proved.³⁰

Also in 1964, Britton formed a company — The Park Group Limited — with two Canadians using a bank in the Bahamas with the intention of publishing and producing his plays for stage and screen, of which the first was to be ‘the Shaw play’.³¹ However, nothing appears to have come to fruition from the Park Group, probably because Britton was insisting that ‘the Shaw play’ be published first, whereas the other directors (who were responsible for all of the company’s not inconsiderable expenses pending a refund from the ‘profits’) were worried about a possible court injunction.³² Three years later Britton established his own company — Promethean Publishers Ltd — which appears never to have published anything either.

Britton spent his last years as a virtual recluse in Margate. In 1969 he wrote a letter to Bertrand Russell from his new home, in which he states that he has had a nervous breakdown, and has lost his house in Tufnell Park along with all of his money; the reasons for this are not mentioned.³³ But Britton was still trying to sue the Society of Authors as late as June 1970, six months before his death at the local hospital following a heart attack.³⁴ There were few obituaries, and even those commented on his obscurity.

Herbert Marshall, who was by that time Professor and Director of Soviet and East European Studies (Performing Arts) at Southern Illinois University, had all of Britton’s literary effects transported to the university, where they remain today.³⁵ But the copyright

³⁰ Attorney General [name illegible], letter to John Parker, House of Commons, 1 June 1970, LBC, Box 2, Folder 23.

³¹ Cecil Thomas, letter to Lionel Britton, 4 December 1964, LBC, Box 2, Folder 21.

³² Cecil Thomas, letter to Lionel Britton, 3 September 1964, LBC, Box 2, Folder 21.

³³ Lionel Britton, letter to Bertrand Russell, 10 June 1969, HB.

³⁴ Death certificate, Lionel Britton, Ramsgate, registration district of Thanet, Kent, 9 January 1971.

³⁵ ‘Forgotten Genius Ends his Days at Margate’.

of all of Britton's work, revealed in Britton's will, went to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection, the World Wildlife Fund (UK), and — inexplicably, as he had no apparent connections there — the vicars and churchwardens of Polstead in Suffolk.

CHAPTER 1

Hunger and Love and the Critics

This chapter concerns the critics' reactions to *Hunger and Love*, and in it I examine a number of critics who wrote about Lionel Britton's work at the time of its publication in 1931. Before looking at some of the contemporary criticisms of *Hunger and Love*, though, an understanding of the observations made would be facilitated by a synopsis of the novel.

Hunger and Love is a semi-autobiographical account of the intellectual development of the working-class orphan Arthur Phelps, who is about sixteen years old at the beginning of the book, and the reader learns almost nothing of his past life. Set entirely in London from 1904 or 1905 to some time during World War I, it records in some detail the extreme poverty of the uneducated Arthur, who starts his working life at a greengrocer's and then continues by working for several booksellers. Throughout most of the book he has very few friends, and almost all of his contact with others is through his work or by chance encounters in the street. Some of his limited spare time is spent trying to make his meagre earnings last until the end of the week — by, for example, mending his shabby clothes — but most of his time is spent in the manic pursuit of the education he never received as a child. Arthur devours any scraps of knowledge that he can, reading works of science or arts indiscriminately. He buys books from the penny 'dumps' on the book barrows that line Farringdon Road, and works his way through the *Penny Cyclopaedia* and *Palgrave's Golden Treasury*. The novel details how Arthur takes advantage of any opportunity to increase his learning by reading at work, when sent out on errands, and during his lunch breaks. Periods of unemployment are described, a few political activities, and Arthur's developing intellectual education arguing with the crowd gathered around Speakers'

Corner. There are also many descriptions of the book trade from a shop assistant's point of view.

The 'Hunger' in the title clearly refers to Arthur's lack of food, but it also alludes to both sexual and intellectual frustration; the 'Love' too refers to sex, as well as to the love of knowledge, and to a much broader love of humanity. The narrator has complete access to Arthur's thoughts and no one else's, and frequently addresses him directly in the second person, often to mock him. The world is thus largely seen through Arthur's (or the narrator's) consciousness, and the novel contains many unspoken insults directed at the bourgeoisie, the church, the government, or the police. Any figures of authority are the targets, and they are seen not only as impediments to his freedom, but throwbacks to an earlier period of evolution.

The novel is a long inter-war howl of contempt for the rule-makers and the people whom the narrator considers to be the war-mongers, the perpetrators of a vast conspiracy. For these reasons alone, it was inevitable that there would be some hostile reactions to the novel. Britton foresaw this, and joked about it before the novel was published: 'I don't think six months in gaol would stop me. Most of my friends say I shall get twenty years. The unkind ones say I shall deserve it.'¹

Hunger and Love is far from being a straightforward narrative, and a laudatory review by Geoffrey West in the *TLS* recognizes that Britton is 'frankly contemptuous of the novel as story'.² The novel is didactic, and filled with philosophical and scientific thoughts, becoming more complex as the book develops. Thoughts hold up the story, or rather, thoughts *are* a large part of the story: sickened by a world where business rules and the rich perpetuate their life-styles through repressing the poor both physically and

¹ Lionel Britton, letter, 'Should Authors Be Paid?', *Everyman*, 4 December 1930, [n. p.], [n. pg.], LBC, Box 12, Folder 10.

² [Geoffrey West], 'Hunger and Love by Lionel Britton', 19 February 1931, *TLS*, 131.

psychologically, the narrator gradually develops a blueprint for a future ruled by the human mind. His future will be one in which people co-operate with each other instead of competing, and all energies will be devoted to the benefit of the world as a whole. There is no romantic nostalgia for a lost world, and Britton embraces technological progress as a means to a vaguely communistic society — or perhaps anarchistic to be more precise, as there is no support for any political party: Arthur Phelps's voice is a lonely one.

It is clear, then, that the book is set in a battle context, as Arthur is constantly pointing out. He bemoans, for instance, the fact that work is taking his life away: 'what is there in this future that will compensate you now for this [...] almost total surrender of your life' (p. 206). As the book draws to a close, a far more sinister threat than Phelps's struggle for economic survival develops as preparations are made for war; the propaganda increases, and the pressure on Arthur to enlist for World War I becomes increasingly strong.

Although the narrator assumes that Arthur Phelps dies at the end of the book, it is by no means certain if he enlists in the army, is hit by shrapnel during an air raid, or dies in another way. All the reader is told is 'Whether you stay at home or go and fight — life is coming to a close', and 'I don't know where you are, but I think it is the end' (pp. 691, 703). Herbert Marshall, who in his review of the novel seamlessly drifts between his own writing style and Brittonese, had evidently read a proof copy of the book, although he rather oddly speaks of 'Private Phelps, lost among the war-murdered millions', and reviewer C. H. Norman also mentions Phelps being 'blown to bits by a shell on the battlefield'.³ Thoughts of joining the war certainly occur to Phelps, although only fleetingly, and only as murderous thoughts might easily briefly occur to a confirmed pacifist: if Phelps had been killed as an active member of the armed forces it would have

³ H. P. J. Marshall, 'Towards the Human: Lionel Britton — A New Force in the World of Thought', *New World*, May 1930, p. 10, LBC, Box 12, Folder 11, (also Box 6, unnumbered folder); C. H. Norman, 'The Revolutionary Spirit in Modern Literature and Drama — XII', *Saturday Review*, 26 November 1936, p. 3, LBC, Box 12, Folder 10.

been a psychological victory for the governing class, and it seems doubtful that this is the impression that the narrator wants to convey. It would be far more in keeping with Arthur's ideas if he died in England, and if he continued to refuse to fight for a cause that he was incapable of identifying as his own. George Rees's interpretation of the ending is much less assured than either Marshall's or Norman's; he does not even believe the assumptions of the narrator:

In the end we simply lose sight of him. He disappears in wartime, and we are left to guess whether he is driven through the power of Parliament, press and pulpit, to join and thus forsake his principles; or whether, stoically enduring the opprobrium of the lickspittle bourgeois mob, he resolutely refuses to be a hired butcher, and lives until the world madness has passed.⁴

Rees's lack of conviction is an appealing interpretation, and the ending of the novel is perhaps better for its ambiguity.

Below, I mention several people who commended Britton's *Brain* of the previous year because the reception of this work obviously affected the way *Hunger and Love* was anticipated and received: the interest generated by *Brain* prepared the ground for the interest in the novel, and even the negative reviews of *Hunger and Love* were lengthy. The fact that Shaw was instrumental in having the play performed is significant, as are his comments on Britton: he said that the play had 'good vocal writing and natural theatre sense', and 'it is clear he can deliver the goods', which was reproduced in many newspapers and magazines. But Shaw's qualification of this remark, 'as soon as he settles down into an established line of business, unless, ass [*sic*] seems probable, he starves in the meantime', was omitted, as were his other reservations.⁵

⁴ George Rees, 'An Epic of Hatred', *Egyptian Gazette*, 28 January 1932, [n. pg.], LBC, Box 12, Folder 10.

⁵ Bernard Shaw, letter to Sir Barry Jackson, 16 September 1929, LBC, Box 2, Folder 2.

Drama critic Hannen Swaffer was one of Britton's greatest champions, and defended him against other critics who attacked his work. At the back of *Hunger and Love*, Putnam reproduced impressive snippets from Swaffer's *Daily Express* review of *Brain*: 'The most highbrow play ever produced in England...Had more thought in it than any other play for years...May be acted in every capital in the world...I prophesy for Lionel Britton a brilliant future' [p. 707]. Britton was grateful for his support and wrote a letter to him from which Swaffer quoted in the *Express*: 'Thanks for the courage with which you stood up against the whole pack of them.'⁶ Other reviews were also highly complimentary. In *The Manchester Guardian* 'R. H. T.' says 'Many great men have amused themselves by forecasting the future of mankind. It seems to the present reviewer that Lionel Britton leaves them all a very long way behind.'⁷ He concludes by proclaiming *Brain* 'a work of genius'. C. E. M. Joad also calls Britton a genius in a long review of *Brain* in *The Sunday Referee*, but it was perhaps the Introduction to *Hunger and Love* by another philosopher — Bertrand Russell — which more than anything else generated such interest in the novel.

There were many reviews of *Hunger and Love*, some positive, some negative, and some mixed. Nevertheless, and perhaps surprisingly for such an anti-Establishment work, hardly any review seems to have been unreservedly negative. Today Britton's name is almost forgotten, with the occasional exceptions of entries in encyclopaedias or bibliographies of science fiction, utopias or computer science, and a very encouraging recent review by Adam Daly; but he was once very briefly a relatively well-known writer: in her biography of Virginia Woolf, for example, Winifred Holtby lists him alongside other working-class authors, all of whom are far better known today than Britton: James Hanley, Sean O'Casey

⁶ Hannen Swaffer, 'Brain a Book Now', [*Daily Express*], [1930], [n. pg.], in the possession of the present author.

⁷ 'R. H. T.', 'Brain', *Manchester Guardian*, 26 June 1930, [n. pg.], LBC, Box 13, Folder 15.

and W. H. Davies.⁸

Frank Swinnerton's reaction to *Hunger and Love*, full of anger at Arthur Phelps for having the gall to 'steal' from his employers' time, is very negative. He says of the young worker: 'His notion of his own greatness is such that he exploits his employers and then savages them [...] because they dismiss him.'⁹ Swinnerton was obviously proud of having worked his way up from office boy to editor of Chatto & Windus to emerge as a staunch member of the Establishment that Britton is attacking. And although self-deprecating about his own intellectual credentials, Swinnerton strongly resents the idea of the working classes becoming intellectuals:

Mr. Russell calls Mr. Britton 'a highly intellectual proletarian.' What a description! And what a terrifying portent! The highbrow sustained by the parental dole is familiar to us but if the slums are also to send us highbrows the end of the world is overdue.

Swinnerton nevertheless sees a number of positive points in the book, although none in Arthur, whom he finds selfish: the main argument in *Hunger and Love* is that it is the bourgeoisie who are selfish.

Rebecca West also has some positive things to say about *Hunger and Love*, and even admits that 'One would have to be cold and a cad not to have a warm corner in one's heart

⁸ Lyman Tower Sargent, *British and American Utopian Literature, 1516–1985: An Annotated, Chronological Bibliography* (Boston, MA: Hall, 1979; repr. New York: Garland, 1988), p. 188; Everett F. Bleiler, *Science Fiction: The Early Years: A Full Description of More Than 3,000 Science-Fiction Stories from the Earliest Times to the Appearance of the Genre Magazines in 1930* (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 1990), p. 85; John Clute and Peter Nicholls, eds, *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (New York: St Martin's Griffin, 1993; rev. 1995), p. 161; Anthony Ralston, Edwin D. Reilly and David Hemmendinger, eds, *Encyclopedia of Computer Science*, 4th ed (New York: Grove's Dictionaries, 2000), p. 706; Adam Daly, 'The Lost Genius of Lionel Britton', *Wormwood*, 6 (2006), pp. 47–57; Winifred Holtby, *Virginia Woolf* (London: Wishart, 1932), p. 58.

⁹ Frank Swinnerton, 'A Hero of Colossal Cheek!', [n. pub.], [n. pg.], LBC, Box 12, Folder 11.

for Arthur Phelps.’¹⁰ However, she continues by saying that ‘Since Mr. Britton is cut off from his fellow creatures by this wall of hatred he has learned nothing about [others in a similar situation to himself]. He has written a book about the destiny of man without knowing anything about man.’

Harold Nicolson is more offended by *Hunger and Love*. He concedes that the book is interesting, but only as a ‘specimen’: ‘it is bottled life, preserved in vinegar’.¹¹ He continues by denouncing Britton as ‘glum and humourless, and he likes to snarl’, adding that if the novel were intended as a satire on the self-educated it was a work of genius, but that he does not think that this is the case. Nicolson’s main complaint is that the book is dangerous because it is about class hatred.

Bernard Shaw’s assessment of *Hunger and Love* appears to be lost, although a comment on the front cover of the dust jacket of the New Zealander John E. Lee’s *Children of the Poor* states ‘A whopper. In its intensity I can only compare it with Lionel Britton’s *Hunger and Love*.’¹²

In an edition of the *Johannesburg Sunday Times* (Britton subscribed to press cutting agencies and collected many reviews of his books from around the world) ‘J. L. L.’ is slightly equivocal about the novel. He calls Britton’s book ‘amazing’, and adds that ‘All the destructive criticism in the world cannot rob “Hunger and Love” of a certain brilliance, or the author of intellectual endowments and a general knowledge of no mean quality.’¹³ But not many people would have understood the concluding remark: ‘If it were not for the

¹⁰ Rebecca West, ‘The Exasperating Egotism of Lionel Britton’, *Daily Telegraph*, 20 February 1931, [n. pg.], LBC, Box 12, Folder 11.

¹¹ Harold Nicolson, ‘Nightmare Novel of an Author Who “Likes to Snarl”’, *Daily Express*, 19 February 1931, [n. pg.], LBC, Box 12, Folder 11.

¹² John A. Lee, *Children of the Poor* (London: Laurie, 1934; repr. Henry, 1949), front cover of dust jacket.

¹³ ‘J. L. L.’, ‘Hunger and Love: By Lionel Britton’, *Johannesburg Sunday Times*, 19 April 1931, [n. pg.], LBC, Box 12, Folder 10.

fact that the author is obviously sincere and has given us much that reaches high levels of excellence, one would be inclined to use the title of his 31st chapter ['All Balls'] as a tabloid description of his book.'

Arnold Bennett's reaction to the novel was not as ambivalent as this, and he was even moved to write a pastiche of Britton's style:

Now Lionel Britton's book. Very Long. Introduction by Bertrand Russell. Yes, by Bertrand Russell. [...] I read and read. [...] I was continually moving my arms, together with all the nerves, tendons, ganglions, veins, arteries, bones, concealed beneath my seven skins.

The day wore on. Curtains. Bourgeois electricity. The surface of the planet on which I sat had moved several thousand miles, not counting its movement round the sun, nor its vaster movement as part of the ever-shifting solar system. Indeed I didn't know where I was in spacetime. ...

Bourgeois dinner. Next day I resumed. Page after big page. I reached page 705. The last. But why the last? 'Well, said I, to the invisible Lionel Britton, who was rushing through the ether as inconceivably fast as I was, 'I've read your novel, Lionel Britton.'¹⁴

Hunger and Love was the last book that Bennett reviewed for the *Evening Standard*, and in the article he also describes both his impression of Britton on the two occasions he met him, as well as his review of the novel, written in his own usual style. Bennett sat next to Britton during the premiere of *Brain*, and although he did not like the play, he was too polite to say so. However, had the invisible Lionel Britton mentioned in the quotation above actually been present at the time that Bennett finished reading *Hunger and Love*, there would have been no such embarrassment: Bennett enjoyed 'a great deal of the book', says that it has 'genuine force', that it is 'not a book to be ignored' and recommends it 'to the stout-hearted'. It is evident that the review was written with a considerable degree of affection for the novel; he calls it 'propaganda, strident as a brass band', but although he

¹⁴ Arnold Bennett, 'Young Man's Novel Slaps Your Cheek: Ferocious Hatred', *Evening Standard*, 26 February 1931, [n. pg.], LBC, Box 18, Folder 3.

does not mind propaganda, feels that Britton ‘frequently forgets that he is telling a story’. It must be said, though, that Britton would not have disagreed with Bennett’s criticism — in a ‘Caution to the Reader’ which was perhaps originally designed as an Introduction to the novel, Britton freely admits that the book has ‘not, strictly speaking, a story’, with ‘nothing of what is usually understood as characters’.¹⁵

This is one of the negative aspects that Orwell saw in the novel, and his comments on it are interesting. He calls the book ‘entirely sound’ as a ‘social document’, but (rather like Britton himself) fails to recognize it as a novel as such: it is more of ‘a kind of monologue on poverty’.¹⁶ But like a number of other reviewers, he finds the repetitions annoying. Nevertheless, as mentioned below in Chapter 3, the book (which Orwell stressed was ‘unusual’), certainly made a lasting impression on him, and almost certainly had an influence on Orwell’s work.

Hunger and Love attracted rather more negative criticism from Stephen Garry’s article in the *Daily Worker*; at the time, ‘socialist realism’ (though not used as an expression until about 1932) was all important to the Communist Party of Great Britain’s approach to fiction, although the degree of its inclusiveness of ‘acceptable’ authors varied considerably through the years.¹⁷ Garry’s article seems to represent the fierce strain of criticism of the time; he has obviously realized that the novel is largely autobiographical, and taking the cue from Britton he addresses him as the dead Arthur Phelps, playing on the word ‘dead’ to mean unthinking, and using the second person throughout. In a manner rather similar to the first section of Bennett’s review, although without any admiration — this is parody

¹⁵ Lionel Britton, ‘Caution to the Reader’, [n. d.], LBC, Series II: Drafts, Box 2, Folder 1.

¹⁶ *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, ed. by Peter Davison, 20 vols (London: Secker & Warburg, 1986–1998; rev. and updated 2000), *A Patriot After All: 1940–1941*, pp. 203–05. (Originally published as ‘Poverty — Plain and Coloured’ by ‘Eric Blair’, *Adelphi*, April 1931, pp. 80–82.)

¹⁷ Andy Croft, *Red Letter Days: British Fiction in the 1930s* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), pp. 59–95.

rather than pastiche — Garry begins with: ‘And so, Arthur Phelps, my boy, you are dead! And no wonder!’¹⁸ Garry has understood the book well, and his main argument is that if Phelps/Britton had spent more time in ideological struggle instead of forming lofty ideas about utopia, he would have arrived at the ‘correct’ way of thinking.

But interestingly, if the Communist Party of Great Britain (via the *Daily Worker*) did not approve of *Hunger and Love*, other reviewers on the left certainly did, and it is significant that one of the most enthusiastic reviews of it was in the anarchist weekly *Freedom*. After giving his appreciation of the late Arnold Bennett, ‘B. M.’ says that ‘Lionel Britton’s work is fated to arouse violent and acrimonious discussion and resentment. People who are positive and have something to say infuriate authority.’¹⁹ The reviewer continues: ‘In my view it is a work of genius and of high literary quality.’ And his final words on Britton’s book are similar to Russell’s: ‘I cannot too strongly urge the claims of this book upon you.’

Another person on the left, J. F. Horrabin, calls Britton’s book ‘A Real Proletarian Novel’, and is almost as enthusiastic as ‘B. M.’. He thinks that Britton should have done some editing of the book because he appears to have unloaded all the fruits of his self-education into it in a haphazard fashion, but says that it is ‘dead right in observation, magnificent in passion. Let no one be frightened off reading it by anything I have said above.’²⁰

The Marxist Philip Henderson was also impressed: ‘Britton has written a work of undisciplined, elemental power. Its protest against the moral degradation that makes human life dependent upon possession of money, stands out like a huge volcanic rock in

¹⁸ Stephen Garry, “‘Hunger and Love’: The Story of a DEAD Worker”, *Daily Worker*, 28 March 1931, [n. pg.], LBC, Box 12, Folder 10.

¹⁹ ‘B. M.’, ‘Books to Buy’, *Freedom: A Journal of Libertarian Thought, Work and Literature*, May 1931, pp. 6–7.

²⁰ J. F. Horrabin, “‘Hunger and Love’: A Real Proletarian Novel”, *Plebs*, September 1931, pp. 210–11 (p. 211).

the polite literary world of our time.’²¹ Henderson claims that Britton’s depiction of Phelps ‘gives his work the quality of an epic’, and also mentions Bennett for having ‘the courage to hail the book as a work of genius’, but disagrees with him saying that *Hunger and Love* is better than *Ulysses*. Unfortunately, he does not give his source, although Bennett certainly said neither of these things in his *Evening Standard* review.

Geoffrey West’s review of *Hunger and Love* in the *Times Literary Supplement* is also highly complimentary, speaking of Britton’s ‘ambitious attempt to synthesize all relevant knowledge in a single coherent attitude to society and the universe at large’²² He concludes: ‘Mr. Lionel Britton has written a remarkable work; if the term “work of genius” is due to originality in purpose and plan, to industry and vitality in execution on a large scale, then it is difficult to withhold it from “Hunger and Love.”’

Another very positive review of *Hunger and Love*, and certainly one of the last in a newspaper, was by the above mentioned George Rees in the *Egyptian Gazette*. In this, he understands Britton’s aim as being to destroy the status quo and begin an egalitarian society, and is obviously in full agreement with him. He is annoyed that the Book Society omitted it from their monthly bulletin, and like Britton, he rails against ‘the bourgeoisie and their system of plunder’ with apparently equal — and personally felt, the reader is bound to conclude — venom:

One can understand now, perhaps, why the Society refused to recommend this novel; why, also, the fatly comfortable Gerald Goulds and James Agates have utterly ignored, in their recapitulation of the year’s best books, a work of striking beauty and originality.²³

²¹ Philip Henderson, *Literature: And a Changing Civilisation* (London: John Lane the Bodley Head, 1935), pp. 143–44.

²² ‘Hunger and Love by Lionel Britton’.

²³ ‘An Epic of Hatred’.

Finally, a word must be said about Bertrand Russell's Introduction to the novel.

Russell calls *Hunger and Love* 'a very remarkable piece of work', 'filled with a splendid rage against the humbug, the cruelty, and the moral degradation of the possessing classes'.²⁴ He has doubts about Britton's vision working in practice, but ends by saying that 'Mr. Britton has portrayed his world with passion, with vividness, with a wealth of illustrative detail, and with a considerable power of generalising thought. [...] I am convinced that his book deserves to be widely read' (p. xi). Russell was one of the very few people who had any idea of how much effort had been put into the book, and one of the few to know that a considerable effort had also been put into finding a publisher for it.

²⁴ Bertrand Russell, Introduction, *Hunger and Love*, pp. vii–xi (p. vii). (Hereafter all page references to *Hunger and Love* are given in parentheses following the quotation.)

CHAPTER 2

What Lionel Britton Is Up To

I have adapted the title of this chapter from ‘What Evolution Is Up To’, one of Lionel Britton’s chapter titles in *Hunger and Love*, as an indication that the content essentially concerns the long evolution of his novel. I discuss the problems that Britton had completing his work, the difficulties he had with publishers, how and why he changed *Hunger and Love* from its earliest surviving state through to the first edition, and conclude with Britton’s attitude to censorship.

The history of *Hunger and Love* is relatively long, and the first point to be borne in mind is that, although it was published in the early 1930s, it is in fact a work of the 1920s. A typewritten two-thousand-word biography of Britton by his P.E.N. friend Erik (later anglicized to ‘Eric’) Warman claims that the novel took a total of eight years to complete, adding: ‘About a quarter of this time was given over to revision for he is not easily satisfied with his work. Usually he expects to retain and revise a manuscript for at least a year after it is finished.’¹ Britton’s own comments on this subject strongly indicate that revision was of constant importance to — and difficulty for — him. In a letter to his close friend Sinead Acheson, Britton writes about explaining to Bernard Shaw the problems he had with a later book:

He asked me how I was getting on and I told him things were a bit difficult because I took so long over everything, and the trouble was that I learnt as I went along, and by the time I’d spent a year over a work I knew so much more than I did at the beginning that I had to start all over again.²

¹ Erik Warman, ‘Life and Lionel Britton’, typescript, [1932 (?)], [pp. 2–3], LBC, Box 6, Folder 1.

² Lionel Britton, letter to Sinead Acheson, 26 October 1935, LBC, Box 2, Folder 12.

In some typewritten autobiographical notes, Britton appears to take his problem lightly, saying that the German edition of *Hunger and Love* was ‘so long translating, owing to Lionel Britton trying to get the translators to write it his way instead of theirs, that the Nazis won the race and it never appeared’.³ (He would of course have been unaware that Tressell’s *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* had been cut by about half its original length by Jessie Pope for Grant Richards, but Britton’s reaction can be imagined.)

Britton himself, then, was obviously to a large extent responsible for the delayed publication of his work, but this was also partly because he was obsessed with the question of it being his own work, as opposed to how others wanted it to appear. As Warman notes of the British edition of *Hunger and Love*, publishers ‘wanted to shorten it [...] or to make it respectable, or both’. Britton’s response to the publishers was: ‘you don’t want to publish my book, [...] you want to publish something that is not my work at all’.⁴ This remark is important to any understanding of Britton’s stance towards authorial possession: his words were virtually the only thing he owned, and he was not prepared to allow the dominant class to take them from him. Aware of the anarchist Proudhon’s dictum, Britton believed that property is theft; he considered his words to be part of his existential integrity, and believed self-expression to be more important than the publication of an inauthentic work. Anyone wanting to interfere with his writing is seen as directly attacking his life. His ideas belong not only to himself but to the people of the future: if the bourgeoisie changed his novel in any way, that property would in effect be stolen. It is in this context that the following outburst in the *Clarion* should be read, rather than as a violent threat: ‘Cut it for me, would they? I wonder how they would like me to cut their throats?’⁵ It is almost as though the narrator of *Hunger and Love*, during one of his more extreme outbursts, has

³ Lionel Britton, ‘Lionel Britton’, typescript, p. [2].

⁴ ‘Life and Lionel Britton’, p. [3].

⁵ Lionel Britton, ‘The Mind of a Ragamuffin’, *Clarion*, May 31, p. 139, LBC, Box 12, Folder 10.

gained control for a moment. The paragraph below, written in a letter to Herbert Marshall shortly before the publication of *Hunger and Love* in the U. S. A., and concerning its future North American publication by Harper, gives a clear picture of Britton's concerns:

Harper's man couldn't bind himself over this side to have the book printed verbatim in [the] U.S.A. so I had to insert a clause in the agreement that I could refuse to give them the book unless they did. Very much disturbed about it. Didn't like the great Harper's being dictated to over a first novel. Never before happened in their experience. I told him it was an unusual first novel. Didn't half make him wild.⁶

Apart from the typesetting, there do not appear to be any differences between the British and the American edition: it seems that Britton's wishes were respected.

Constable had already experienced Britton's hostile attitude to cutting when they were considering publishing *Hunger and Love* in Britain. They had sent him a list, more than four pages long, of deletions they considered necessary before publication could begin. Some of their objections were, or at least purported to be, purely factual — any mention of Baldwin's pipe in the Edwardian era was anachronistic, the expression 'piddle complex' was inaccurate because 'a dog does this to find his way home. No complex; common-sense', and they affirmed that Darwin had withheld publication of *Origin of Species* 'in order to make his hypothesis water-tight' rather than to make more profit, as Britton had claimed.⁷ They also disliked Britton's repetitions and found his long philosophical digressions unnecessary. In all, they wanted to cut the typescript by about a quarter. Financial considerations obviously entered into their thinking because, at over seven hundred pages, *Hunger and Love* was very long as well as unusual. Britton began to write his responses to the required deletions. To the instruction 'omit notes and preface', he

⁶ Lionel Britton, letter to Herbert Marshall, 5 December 1930, LBC, Box 2, Folder 3.

wrote that the notes were ‘never intended’, to the question ‘is distribution necessarily destructive?’ he wrote ‘No of course not’, and then simply wrote ‘No’ to all the required omissions on the rest of the page. It seems that at the beginning he was responding defensively and argumentatively, but he did not trouble himself to make a response to any of Constable’s requirements on the following pages: he had already read enough. And Michael Sadleir’s letter to Britton the following month confirms that, as a result of a long conversation between Britton and Constable’s Mr Tilby at the Constitutional Club, the publishers had withdrawn their provisional acceptance of *Hunger and Love*.⁸ C. E. M. Joad said of Britton, ‘Like most geniuses, he has refused to alter so much as a line, a colon, or a comma of his work.’⁹ Britton became noted for his attitude, to such an extent that most newspaper articles about him (and there were many: Britton made very good copy) would usually mention this refusal to delete anything. One newspaper had as a sub-title of one of its articles ‘Lionel Britton, the Author Who Won’t Be “Cut”’.¹⁰

On Britton’s death in 1971, Herbert Marshall repeated this story in a press release duly quoted in the regional newspaper: ‘He would not allow a single comma to be altered from his original text, so eventually quarrelled with his publisher, who refused to publish the vast, lengthy work without some editing and thus it remained until his very death.’¹¹ Nevertheless, in one newspaper article, Britton had attempted to dispel the myth that he never listened to advice on cutting his work, stating that he had written *Spacetime Inn* eight

⁷ S. Looker, letter to Lionel Britton, 19 December 1929, LBC, Box 2, Folder 2.

⁸ Michael Sadleir, letter to Lionel Britton, 11 January 1930, LBC, Box 2, Folder 2.

⁹ C. E. M. Joad, ‘Future of the Human Race: “Brain” — A Brilliant Dramatic Philosophy of Life’, *Sunday Referee*, 27 April 1930, [n. pg.], LBC, Box 12, Folder 11.

¹⁰ Anonymous, ‘G. B. S. and Eve in a Play: The Audience Requested to Laugh at It: Road Smash Symbol: Lionel Britton, the Author Who Won’t Be “Cut”’, *Star*, 3 August 1931, [n. pg.], LBC, Box 12, Folder 10.

¹¹ ‘Forgotten Genius Ends his Days at Margate’.

times and had 'altered and cut it in the light of criticism received from friends'.¹² It was the perceived arrogance of publishers that Britton was railing against, because they represented the bourgeois profit world that he so detested.

When Britton told Putnam about Constable's rejection of his novel, it appears that he only mentioned their objection to the size of the book because Constant Huntington tells him: 'of course, when people were holding pistols at your head to make you cut it, just on the ground of bulk, as the price of acceptance, you naturally dug yourself in and resisted to the death'.¹³ But *Hunger and Love*, of course, did not die. This was Huntington's third letter to Britton, and Putnam had agreed — initially apparently unconditionally and without argument — to publish the manuscript in the same state as Britton had given it to them, but subject to any emendations he chose to make. Britton was evidently making final revisions to *Hunger and Love* about the time of Huntington's letter, and there is even a comment on it in the published book, where the narrator says 'I did this lying on my belly in Green Park in shirtsleeves in 1930, revising a manuscript written nearly four years before' (p. 492).

And Putnam, or Huntington to be more exact, believed that *Hunger and Love* was an exceptional work. Before Russell wrote his Introduction to the book Putnam were apparently considering one of their own, written by Huntington. Several introductory pages have survived, and although the end is missing they contain at least two thousand words full of portentous praise: 'The author himself has not called the book a novel, though he plainly regards it as the starting-point of something new in literature, and perhaps as the beginning of that new development to which the novel must finally come.'¹⁴

¹² Anonymous, 'Mr. Shaw as a Critic: Cryptic Comment on Work of Fellow Author: Potted History', [n. pub.], [n. d.], [n. pg.], LBC, Box 12, Folder 10.

¹³ C. J. Huntington, letter to Lionel Britton, 2 June 1930, LBC, Box 2, Folder 3.

¹⁴ [C. J. Huntington], 'Hunger and Love', typed Introduction (fragment), [c. 1930–1], LBC, Series II: Drafts, Box 2, Folder 2.

No part of the first draft of *Hunger and Love* survives. In an article in a 1934 issue of *Pitman's Journal of Commercial Education* Britton reveals, '*Hunger and Love* was written in shorthand mostly in buses or at Lyons. I am sorry to say I destroyed the original MS. There was such a lot of it, and life was difficult in those days'.¹⁵ However, excluding a bound proof copy which is almost identical to the final copy (hereafter FC), the LBC holds two other pre-publication copies in different states. The later one is a double-spaced mimeograph (hereafter MG) that Putnam sent Britton in three separate volumes.¹⁶ It contains a few revised chapter titles, a number of deletions (sometimes where Britton is unclear about specific factual details), additions, and a very large number of changes in punctuation; otherwise, it is quite close to the FC, and there is no difference between the chapter titles in the MG, the revised MG (hereafter MG(R)), or the FC. Britton's typescript (hereafter TS) is an earlier single-spaced draft that contains many differences from the FC, including many changes to the content and a number of chapter title alterations.¹⁷ Sometimes, Britton appears to be unsure about chapter titles, so omits them when typing and later adds them in pencil, or occasionally he crosses out typewritten titles and inserts new ones. There are thirty-six chapters in the TS and forty-two in the FC.

¹⁵ Anonymous, 'Mr. Lionel Britton', *Pitman's Journal of Commercial Education*, 2 June 1934, p. 395, LBC, Box 6, unnumbered folder.

¹⁶ Lionel Britton, 'Hunger and Love', MG, Volume I, [n. d.], LBC, Series II: Drafts, Box 2, Folders 3–4; Lionel Britton, 'Hunger and Love', MG, Volume II, [n. d.], LBC, Series II: Drafts, Box 3, Folders 1–3; Lionel Britton, 'Hunger and Love', MG, Volume III (one of two), [n. d.], LBC, Series II: Drafts, Box 3, Folder 4; Lionel Britton, 'Hunger and Love', MG, Volume III (two of two), [n. d.], LBC, Series 2: Drafts, Box 4, Folder 1; Rebecca Gorski, 'Scope and Content Note', '*Hunger and Love Materials*', p. 1, 2004, LBC.

¹⁷ Lionel Britton, 'Hunger and Love', TS, [n. d.], LBC, Series II: Drafts, Box 4, Folders 2–3. Some emendations are made to the TS in pencil, and when referring specifically to these revisions I shall use the abbreviation TS(R). In discussing the different states of the novel, text within the angle brackets <> indicates an omission, and when used within the upper half-brackets [] indicates an addition.

I now analyse several chapter title changes between the TS and the FC, suggesting reasons for them. Appendix 1 contains details of all title changes, including differences in punctuation where significant.

Chapter 1 of the TS, as in the FC, is entitled 'The Rat Comes Out of his Hole'. However, the chapter title list (being the only prelim of the TS, and which was compiled at several different dates) refers to an earlier title, 'Pot'erbs, Poetry and Smells', which seems to encapsulate Arthur's life adequately.¹⁸ There is the poetry and the literature he is maniacally reading in his pursuit to 'get a mind', the pot herbs he sells in the greengrocer's and the pervasive unpleasant smells of his lodgings and the streets he wanders around. Superficially, the original title perhaps seems superior to the new one, although the rat leaving his hole — an image also used at the end of *Animal Ideas* — represents the first movement towards the slow evolution to a new civilisation. Throughout *Hunger and Love*, animal imagery is used for the representatives of British society, as they in turn, Britton believes, treat the working classes like animals. Arthur is an example of those classes, and his frantic attempts to educate himself are a huge effort to change his lowly status to one higher up the evolutionary scale. 'The Rat Comes Out of his Hole' is consequently a very appropriate title for the beginning of the novel.

Chapter 3 was originally entitled 'The Sack. And Paradise' (TS(R) pp. 18–34), and is among several other chapter titles added in pencil after the chapters had been typed. Later, however, Britton crossed out 'And Paradise' to create a new chapter, 'Paradise', on page 25. The point at which the chapters are separated corresponds exactly to the divisions between 'The Sack' and 'Columbus of the Mind' in the FC (TS pp. 12–21, FC pp. 22–35). It is not difficult to understand why Britton made this decision because these two chapters are strongly autobiographical and represent an important turning point in Britton's and

¹⁸ Lionel Britton, 'Hunger and Love' Series II: Drafts, p. [i], Box 4, Folders 2–3.

Arthur's intellectual education: this is a fictional representation of the time that Britton was dismissed from his employment at the greengrocer's and started work at the University Book Co., when he more fully immersed himself in the world of books.¹⁹ This was when Britton became acquainted with the penny dumps on the book barrows in Farringdon Road, although the date is slightly later in the novel. The change of chapter title is also significant. 'Paradise' may emphasize the narrator-protagonist's feelings, but perhaps the religious connotations are too strong for an atheist like Britton, and 'Columbus' indicates the exploratory task Phelps is undertaking. And the finally revised title allows Britton to insert the crucial word 'Mind', being the second of three chapter titles towards the beginning of the book which contain that word.

The chapter title change from 'x and y' to 'Nose Drip and Knowledge' is also significant. Whereas 'x and y' presumably merely refer to Arthur's early struggles with algebra, the signification becomes extended to the learning process in general with the word 'Knowledge', incorporating the many other areas of education which Phelps is battling with. The 'Nose Drip' also brings in the human element, with Phelps not only mentally battling to learn but battling with the elements in the winter as his cold hands hold a book on his way back from a publisher after having collected some books for the shop. It is an enduring image and a striking one that many critics were left with after finishing the book. For Britton, it was an image of himself that would not leave him, and it is significant that the title, as it were, fleshes Arthur out more.

Two chapter title alterations are an indication of the movement towards colloquialization which is such an important issue in the difference between the content of the TS and the FC. 'Knackered' and 'Love in the Lavatory' were originally entitled 'Where We Stand' and 'W. C.' respectively. 'Knackered', although now an inoffensive slang word, would

¹⁹ S. W. Heaton, letter of reference about Lionel Britton, 18 November 1918, LBC, Box 2, Folder 2.

perhaps have been thought slightly risqué in the 1930s. Here, the reader is clearly intended to see an analogy between Arthur and the blinkered carthorse walking along the well-trodden path of trade. But what makes the title 'Knackered' so effective is that the signification operates on three levels: firstly the horse is being taken to the knacker's yard, secondly this is because it is 'knackered' (or terminally exhausted), and finally there is also in the title, as in the text itself, an allusion to the horse's neutered testicles (or 'knackers'). Linked to this is the understood but unwritten analogy between the lack of sexual potency of the horse and the virtual celibacy of the unmarried working classes which Britton saw imposed by the dominant ideology.

Finally, the original chapter title 'Dans Cette Galère' alludes to the expression '*Que diable allait-il faire dans cette galère?*', a well-known quotation from Molière's *Les Fourberies de Scapin* once in common use to question the reason why someone should find himself or herself in a particularly unpleasant situation.²⁰ Louis MacNeice, for instance, used a similar expression in 1928 in a postcard to 'one of [his] fellow Old Marlburians' during a tedious liner cruise with his father.²¹ Britton's appropriation of the expression for a chapter title is interesting; 'galère' is French for a sailing galley, and can be used figuratively to indicate an unfortunate situation, originally that of a galley slave: Britton appears to be underlining the fact that Arthur is a 'slave'. But perhaps he abandoned the idea of using it because he thought it nevertheless sounded too pompous, and Herbert Marshall's pre-publication comments on the novel, in an article in *New World* written in the style of Britton himself, gives the best explanation of the effectiveness of the change of chapter title to the simpler, and far more direct, 'Why?': 'you don't want

²⁰ Molière, *Les Fourberies de Scapin* (Paris: D. Thierry, C. Barbin and P. Trabouillet, 1682; repr. Gallimard, 1978), Act II, Scene VII.

²¹ *Selected Prose of Louis MacNeice*, ed. by Alan Heuser (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 222.

disease, unemployment, unhappiness, repression of your urgings and your love. But THEY HAPPEN. They are CAUSED! [...] In the name of the human race, WHY?’²²

All in all, the chapter titles indicate a move away from the academic and towards the more colloquial. They emphasize what Britton is doing to the book as a whole: they reflect a use of English more attuned to the working-class experience of it. And the titles are also a little mischievous: there is far more to Arthur than desperate bookishness and anger with the status quo, and *Hunger and Love* is filled with passages of mischief and humour as well as anger.

To move to the text itself, the overall impression the TS gives is of a patchwork, something to which Britton was continually making amendments. Some pages have obviously been added, some have been removed and retyped, and a number of pages — often used with either a different typewriter ribbon or a different state of the same ribbon — consist of two or three pieces of paper glued together. The largest number of added pages makes up the chapter ‘Romance and Reality’, which Britton wrote after the other chapters, and this concerns how the narrator sees ways in which the Establishment masks the truth from the population.

It is evident from all of this, then, that the TS was constantly evolving, with Britton making frequent alterations by deleting old paragraphs or pages and inserting new ones, although not necessarily in the same places. There is much in *Hunger and Love* which is autobiographical, so much that, apart from the names of his characters, it is sometimes difficult to know what is fictional. But the reader discovers almost nothing of Arthur’s life before the book begins. One very good reason for this is that Britton was consciously writing a ‘working-class’ novel, which will be discussed in the next chapter. In order to make Arthur’s working-class credentials watertight, and to highlight the gradual process of

²² ‘Towards the Human’.

his education, Arthur more or less starts from an educational tabula rasa. The passage below provides an obvious example of Britton excising an incongruous reference to Arthur's past. Near the beginning of the TS he deleted several paragraphs which deal with Arthur from a particularly personal angle, and an example of the differences between the TS and the TS(R) is shown below:

The cause of his general loneliness, so far at any rate as male friends went, was simply that he was rather more intelligent than his fellows ' & that his parents, while they lasted, had been better off ' ; such chance acquaintances as he made were lacking in sympathy, and remained casual. Society makes very little provision for 'society' in his class [...] (TS(R), p. 21).

There is no mention of Arthur's parents in the FC.

One of the principal differences between the TS and the FC is in the punctuation: in the TS, Britton tended to use long, sprawling sentences punctuated by semicolons, colons and/or commas. While correcting the MG, though, he began excising a large number of 'accidentals' in order to create more sentences. The following passage, with a comparatively short sentence for Britton, is a typical illustration of his former style, where Arthur discusses his greengrocer employer:

He did not feel the awe he was intended to, but sometimes he felt envy; he had rather an honest turn of mind, but there were times when he felt he would have liked to buy dear and sell cheap for himself; and when you became Mayor you could swank like hell (TS p. 4).²³

Ignoring the obviously incorrect order of 'dear' and 'cheap' (which Britton later corrected) and the interesting transformation from third to second person (a device of Britton's which I shall comment on later), in the MG(R), as in the FC, each comma and semicolon is replaced by a full stop: from one sentence, five are created (FC p. 4).

²³ Lionel Britton, 'Hunger and Love' MG, p. 4, LBC, Series II, Box 2, Folder 3.

Also part of the revision process is the breaking up of a large number of long paragraphs to turn a single line, phrase, or word into a whole paragraph, along with the creation of many one-word sentences. The general content of the consecutive paragraphs below exists in the TS, but does not appear in the same form in the FC:

They did you out of the sun.

They gave you eight more shillings a week.

Girls there used to be in that other shop.

You were middle class now.

‘Boy’ then (FC p. 270).

Here there are five separate facts springing into Arthur’s consciousness, five details broken into short, separate lines. One of the effects of this is to aerate the text, to create a greater impression of readability.

The rest of this chapter involves the changes in the ‘substantives’ from the TS to the FC. In spite of the many differences between these two states, there is no significant difference in word count between the single-spaced four-hundred-and-fifteen-page TS and the seven-hundred-and-five-page FC. In the interests of legibility — Britton was a rather poor and often erratic typist — all obvious typographical errors (he very rarely made any obvious orthographical ones) in all quotations I give have been silently corrected, although I have retained all the original punctuation.

Occasionally, Britton writes an ambiguous passage and corrects it later: for instance, he writes the sentence ‘The old man used to look in now and again, and then it seemed he was always in the way’ (TS p. 3). In the FC, ‘he’ is changed to ‘Arthur’ for clarity of understanding. Sometimes, changes are made where formerly there was clumsiness, such as ‘<And so you pass> ‘You go’ out<,> into London’ (TS p. 227, FC p. 334). On many more occasions, the changes are purely aesthetic. In the following example, the original sentence was grammatically accurate and unambiguous, but here it is improved: ‘Less

work for you <to do>, less trouble for me' (TS p. 7, FC p. 8); the simple omission of two brief words creates a more symmetrically structured pattern. To take another example, one paragraph in the TS simply begins 'Trodden off by feet' (TS p. 156). The sentence is retained in the FC, but in front of it Britton later inserts: 'And down here the pavement wears and is replaced, wears and is replaced again' (FC p. 217). This is almost poetic in its rhythmic repetition. The emphasis is on the slow movement of time and its effects, which is one of the themes of the book as a whole.

Study of both the TS and the FC shows that there are many examples of emendations which attempt to use a more everyday language, such as when a sentence concerning the grocer's shop is changed: 'unless there were string bags <in evidence> 'about ' (TS p. 3, FC p. 4). 'In evidence' sounds a little incongruous, too formal for the occasion, and certainly too formal for Arthur. A similar emendation appears later: 'A certain slight sense of his environment <percolated> 'oozed through' the upper crust of his consciousness' (TS p. 9, FC p. 11). It is often impossible to distinguish the aesthetic changes Britton was making from the general colloquializing of the text. Throughout the book, there are examples of this new style, in which, for example, 'Youngster' is changed to 'kid' (TS p. 4, FC p. 5), 'head' to 'napper' (TS p. 345, FC p. 589), and 'Throw out your mouldy pennies!' becomes 'Throw out your mouldy coppers!', with an obvious pun on a common slang term for policemen (TS p. 255, FC p. 381). When Arthur gets a half-holiday, his response in the later state is more in character with working-class speech: 'By the Lord, this was aristocratic!' (TS p. 26) becomes 'Say, bo! can you beat it? This is life!' (FC p. 23). The past tense has gone, the language invites reply, and the general effect is participatory. The effect of the colloquialization is to create a more credible — indeed a truer version of — Arthur.

Another example of the colloquialization is illuminating. In a passage in the TS which is without doubt autobiographical, and which is in the main omitted in the FC, the narrator explains his thoughts on religion:

Having been forced in his 'youth' to go to church, the first act of his 'manhood' -- the freedom from restraint which comes of eating bread bought with one's own money -- was to eschew, renounce and abandon all thought for or semblance of religion, as he imagined; at any rate, all conscious or willing obedience or respect (TS p. 20).

The phrasing is certainly a little clumsy, therefore one of the reasons for excision, but the equivalent of this in the FC is very different and much blunter: 'Arthur Phelps had had enough of religion at school. In common with all the other boys of the school he had pulled the plug on all willing obedience or respect' (FC p. 16). The self-important, tautological language has been replaced, and 'had enough' and 'pulled the plug' are more direct and conversational than 'eschew, renounce and abandon'. Britton's thesaurus has its powerful moments, but this is not one of them. The consequences for the reader's relationship with Arthur are plain — the narrator is speaking with his own (or rather Arthur's) voice.

Another change is to give a greater impression of immediacy, of which the following is an example. In the TS:

Going upstairs with his tin of Globe Polish in his hand, and his polishing rags, to do those infernal brasses, he saw a sixpence lying on the stairs. Where it came from, nobody knows to this day; it just lay there and shone, and he picked it up and put it into his pocket (TS p. 58).

In the FC, this changes to:

You are going upstairs with tin of Globe Polish and polishing rags to do those infernal brasses; and what is that on the stairs, Arthur, in that corner? That's it! It's a sixpence. *I* don't know how it got there. *You* don't know how it got there. It lay there and shone. You picked it up and put it in your pocket (FC p. 65).

Of obvious significance here is that the narrator has changed his address to Arthur from the third to the second person. Furthermore, the narrator questions him, leads his gaze to the very spot where the sixpence lies; and Britton enhances this immediacy in a small way by adding exclamation marks (such as the one above) to his novel, but more importantly he devises other ways of developing the narrator's depiction of Arthur. Repetition is one of the ways the narrator emphasizes his didactic points, how he shows that all learning (including evolutionary learning) is usually achieved through constant repetition, but repetition is also effective to emphasize a psychological point. In the above episode with the sixpence, the TS states 'The truth is, that he was a thief' (TS p. 58). Britton had obviously placed a comma in a rather unorthodox place to emphasize the fact 'that he was a thief', but the use of the comma-free repetition in the FC produces a more dramatic effect: 'Thief thief thief thief thief thief' (FC p. 65). The repetition can be read either as an insistent and direct mocking of Arthur by the narrator, or as part of the internal monologue. In this latter reading, it is the absence of commas that strengthen the sentence as the repetition of the word 'thief' brands itself into Arthur's consciousness. Another notable use of repetition is in a much more positive context; in response to a statement from Sarnar: 'Arthur, I want you to take this parcel. Wait for the money', which will take him out of the claustrophobic confines of the bookshop, the simple reaction of the Arthur of the TS is to think 'Freedom!' (TS p. 149). In the FC, though, Arthur is (at least mentally) rather more ecstatic: 'Freedom, freedom, freedom! Open air. Freedom!' (FC p. 207). The language here is more in keeping with the reality of Arthur's enthusiasm, a more direct representation of what he thinks, and in the context is much more humorous.

The passage below is a clear example of another style of Britton's:

And here's you, as cold as hell. Stuck up in <the> shop all day, earning <someone else's> 'old Sarnar's 'living, <and having to> hand 'ing ' over <the> best books in <the> shop ' ' <to do it:

books you really would like to have kept to have had a peep into yourself. Some> great
 lout<,> comes in ' ' <and> yanks 'em off. <And b> 'B'y <the time> dinner 'time'<hour comes
 you> have to use both hands to <help you to>hold <the> pencil <to> enter <them up> in <the> till-
 book ' ' <-- oh hell,> 'Ain't ' it <i s> cold! (TS p. 152, FC p. 212).

The movement of the revisions is towards the 'head-line abbreviation' Russell spoke of in the Introduction to the book, and the emendations are typical of the many thousands that became part of the FC (FC p. vii). In under one hundred words in the TS (later emended to about fifty in the FC), Britton has omitted the definite article six times, and 'some' and 'he' once. The two instances of 'and' become submerged in a more staccato narrative. The narrator says 'oh hell, it *is* cold' (Britton frequently uses spaced letters, as opposed to underscoring, to denote the use of italics) in the TS, although this is a little quaint and perhaps slightly artificial. The final version, 'Ain't it cold!', with a colloquial rhetorical question replacing the pure statement of 'it *is*' seems to invite the reader into the narrative, the continuation of the exclamation mark in place of a perhaps strictly grammatically correct question mark again lending the passage a greater immediacy, charging it with a greater impact as the narrator moves away from the formality of language conventions. The use of the second person permits a greater flexibility, giving the narrator a more intensive access to the workings of Arthur's mind than the use of the third person would have allowed. It also brings the reader more directly into contact with the protagonist.

Another paragraph also shows one extension of this editing process: '<You l> 'L' b o k at <a> phrase <a couple of times>, memorise <it>, <and then> go about <the> shop ' ' do<ing the> bourgeois job<,> ' ' when <you've got the> phrase thoroughly in<to your head> 'napper ' , have another peep' (TS p. 345, FC p. 589). In this passage, the reader's perception of Arthur is caught up with the narrative style, and again the writing appears as if it expresses the way Arthur thinks. Britton has cut phrases to include only a minimum of

words for intelligibility and deleted articles he believes to be superfluous. More importantly, the second person has been excised on three occasions. It is as though the narrator is merging with Arthur, making the passage read much more immediately than the previous one, and again this is an issue I shall deal with more fully in Chapter 5, on 'Outsider Modernism'.

A final example of the above phenomenon is in the 'Why?' chapter. In the course of an 'open-air parliament' at Speakers' Corner, when asked which authority Arthur's views come from, the narrator transgresses the conventional sentence structure, even to the point of taking the clipped nature of his usual remarks to greater extremes. He asks four questions in a short space:

What mean, authority? Will what say be different if stick name on? Same after as before. Give name,—how know name said what you said? or if say,— how know name mean what you meant? If not reasonable out own head, no use out someone else's (FC p. 286).

This is a variation of the 'head-line abbreviation', and again despite the truncation no meaning is lost but the writing is more casual in effect and more idiosyncratic. Also, by excising most of the pronouns, there is again a tendency for the language to merge into a vague oneness. And the voice that Britton arrives at through the revision process seems fresher than the slightly stilted use of the former narrative voice in the TS. Frequently, as Britton changed the wording of Arthur's reactions to his appalling life, the anger intensifies.

As Britton wrestles with the process of colloquializing *Hunger and Love*, of investing it with more linguistic freedom, he is moving away from the self-consciously literary writing of the early days of the novel, and the sniping at institutions intensifies. Interjections are part of the sniping, and Britton frequently uses them, perhaps in the form of a sentence, a phrase or simply a single word added to the original TS. For example, in the TS he asks,

‘[W]hat’s the structure of society got to do with you?’ (TS p. 253), to which he later adds ‘Haven’t you got your nose-bag?’ (FC p. 376).

Putney Hill is one of Arthur’s Sunday haunts, where he goes during the brief time that he has free. And at the end of his day the intensified anger between the TS and the FC is quite evident, as in this example: ‘<Going> ‘You are coming’ down Putney Hill, <night coming on,> ‘homewards to the rent-sneaks,’ tradewards<.> ‘to the profit-sneaks, away from freedom, the open-air and life; the sun has gone, and night has come on’ (TS p. 163, FC p. 229). His anger obviously grew as he relived the scene through the revision process, and the additions are a major improvement: the reader is given Arthur’s opinions about landlords and his boss, and can form an accurate idea of his growing resentment towards the injustice of society.

Sometimes, the narrator’s additions to the FC are casually bitter and cynical, as when he contemplates his boss Murdoch’s annual earnings, where he adds two sentences:

<Twenty-> ‘Two thousand ‘five hundred pounds is quite a lot<,>’ ‘<but then the man really does nothing for it and it doesn’t strike> ‘Yet somehow it never struck’ you as a lot<,> because it is <so> very little <in comparison with the> ‘For an’ income<s> of the do-nothing class<,>’. You took it as natural. Isn’t that what you went to Sunday School for?’ (TS p. 225, FC p. 330).

Religion is seen as the opium of the working classes, designed to control by stupefaction. Britton’s targets vary around the same circle, and very often the narrator finds something to add to an observation, and this is more often than not a howl of abuse aimed at the Establishment. Where a comment might be very bluntly — almost neutrally — expressed in the TS, in the FC it is much more fully developed.

To give a more recent example, an episode in the working-class writer James Kelman’s *A Disaffection* (1989) clearly shows in a few sentences the kind of transformation that was taking place in Britton’s typescripts. In disillusionment, the protagonist Patrick Doyle abandons his job as a schoolteacher; in many ways he is tired of his current life, but above

all he is tired of leading it according to the rules of the Establishment. As he parks his car on his way to visit his brother, something happens to the narrative voice:

He patted the car bonnet en route to the pavement where he proceeded to traverse the flagstones up the stairs and into the closemouth. Traversed the flagstones up the stairs and into the bloody closemouth. Is this fucking Mars! Traversed the fucking bastarn [*sic*] flagstones onto the planet fucking Vulcan for christ sake'.²⁴

Patrick is depressed and angry, and becomes even angrier when he finds himself adopting the middle-class discourse, using expressions such as 'en route to' and 'proceeded to traverse'. The comments that follow disrupt this artificiality or pretentiousness and introduce a working-class discourse into the narrative: in so doing, the movement is away from a world which to the narrator appears be on another (even non-existent) planet. Britton is doing a very similar thing, although unlike Kelman he had more difficulties with the censors.

Britton was very much aware of the presence of the censor, and his opinion of the censorship of stage nudity, for example, is plainly expressed in a stage note in *Brain*. More than a century before, Martin Shee spoke of making changes to his play *Alasco* (1824) as of someone 'cooking his conceptions to the taste of authority'.²⁵ Britton, especially as one who compared books to mind food, would have sympathized with this view: he saw the taste of authority as extremely bitter, which is clear from the following stage direction digression in *Brain*:

[A young man] is quite naked, but owing to a convention obtaining to-day among town councillors and clergymen that other people's bodies are also obscene, the actual player will presumably be wearing skin tights. The implied insult to the rest of the world does not come from the author, nor, I

²⁴ James Kelman, *A Disaffection* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1989), p. 252.

²⁵ Dominic Shellard and Steve Nicholson with Miriam Handley, *The Lord Chamberlain Regrets...: A History of British Theatre Censorship* (London: The British Library, 2004), p. 4.

should think, from any management courageous enough to produce this play. In print, the man is naked.²⁶

The above comment also links with my comments on nakedness in Chapter 6.

Remaining on the subject of theatre censorship but even more relevant to *Hunger and Love* because this concerns Britton's use of language, which was seen by some as offensive, a letter concerning a licence to perform *Spacetime Inn* at an unnamed location is indicative of both his tact, and at the same time of his reluctance to be censored. In answer to the Assistant Comptroller of the Lord Chamberlain's Office, granting him permission to stage the play if he omits a number of offending words, Britton agrees to replace five instances of the word 'Christ' with 'gawd', three 'bastards' and one 'sods' with 'swine', and an 'arse' with a 'bottom'. He then makes a few attempts at a kind of plea bargaining: he wonders if, having agreed to forsake a few 'bastards' for 'swine', the Examiner of Plays (the Lord Chamberlain's appointee) will relent and allow him to use the word 'bloody' twice on two of the same pages because 'It is a strong situation, and it becomes silly unless a strong word is used.'²⁷ He also points out that the Examiner of Plays appears to have overlooked one mention of 'sods', and offers to delete it, only immediately to request that he be allowed to retain 'bloody insides' because 'they really are bloody when they are torn out'. Such niceties appear farcical today, of course, and it is difficult —perhaps impossible— to imagine Britton taking his letter entirely seriously, but, along with its apparent good humour, it must have been written with considerable irritation, if not anger.

But this kind of bargaining was not particularly unusual during this period. The above is an example of the kind of stage censorship that existed in the UK until 1968, when the

²⁶ Brain, p. 74.

²⁷ Assistant Comptroller [name obliterated], Lord Chamberlain's Office, letter to Lionel Britton, 18 December 1933, LBC, Box 14, Folder 9; Lionel Britton, letter to Lord Chamberlain's Office, 27 December 1933, LBC, Box 14, Folder 9.

Lord Chamberlain's Office was closed down. With Putnam and the novel *Hunger and Love*, Britton initially had no obvious problems with censorship, although — perhaps unsurprisingly — the book was banned in what was then the Irish Free State.²⁸ The sensibilities of the reading public were not protected by an equivalent of the Lord Chamberlain's Office, and all of the words Britton was forced to delete from the stage performance of *Spacetime Inn* were, as in the book itself, included in *Hunger and Love*. The language in the novel was possibly a little strong for 1931, but not especially so, although it is quite clear that Britton exercised some degree of self-censorship: he knew that there were limits beyond which he could not go.

Certainly the 'All Balls' chapter received more criticism than any other. Warman teasingly refers to it as 'a certain chapter', and reveals that the printers were very squeamish about it. The MG contains a large number of blue and red pencil marks, often ticked down the margins, and is one chapter that Britton left virtually untouched in his revisions. According to Warman it was the printers who objected to the chapter, and claims that Britton then forced the publishers to find new printers.²⁹ But that was still not the end of the matter; Putnam later raised objections to Britton's insistence that they use chapter headers on each page:

Had long argument with Putnam over ALL BALLS chapter heading. [...] Putnam's first tried to persuade me not to have chapter-headings at top of page. [...] Then it came out that what they really wanted was not to have ALL BALLS on page after page. Very good selling point, the bloody fools. However, they thought it salacious and didn't want make [sic] money that way. I sympathise with them so far, but me salacious!³⁰

²⁸ Anonymous, 'Censorship Act: Latest List of Banned Books', *Cork Weekly Examiner*, 14 March 1931, [n. pg.], LBC, Box 12, Folder 10.

²⁹ 'Life and Lionel Britton', p. [3].

³⁰ Lionel Britton, letter to Herbert Marshall, 5 December 1930, LBC, Box 2, Folder 3.

In the FC the chapter headers are not capitalized, but this is a minor detail because Britton took obvious delight in seeing 'All Balls' as a chapter header.

Britton used scarcely any censorship between the TS and the FC: on the contrary, he intensified the risqué language and the anger. He appears to have exploited Putnam's more sympathetic disposition to the utmost, or at least to have taken it as far as he thought it would go. As examples of the intensification, he changed 'godstruth!' (TS p. 258) to 'Bleedin' Jesus' (FC p. 386), and, with a possible allusion to Tressell, 'ragged-eyed blighter' (TS p. 203) becomes 'ragged-arsed loungers and scroungers' in a paragraph that includes the same compound adjective three times, along with 'ragged-arsedness' (FC p. 297). The paragraph below, which is highly critical of a number of figures of authority, does not exist in any form in the TS:

All balls they are, and mankind is expected to do reverence to them. See this fellow here?—he's a horse-hair wig; see that chap?—he's a pipe; see this one?—he's a stand-up collar; that chap's an eyeglass; this one is a nickname, that one is an attitude. You look at them and wonder what they would DO without their balls (FC p. 379).

Figures of authority, as in the quotation from the 'All Balls' chapter above, clearly dwell in a metonymic universe according to Britton: they are figures of ridicule, having no more substance as human beings than the objects they are represented by. And by moving along his chamber of horrors, pointing out his exhibits in the process, Britton borders on the surreal. Perhaps the fact that the suggestions in the chapter that 'All Balls' referred to the pursuit of golf, rather than being Britton's judgement of 'respectable' society as a whole (which it undoubtedly was), are the only things that allowed it through the censorship net.

Bishops, judges, mayors and teachers are all obvious targets, although in the TS there is hardly any mention of royalty in the book. Britton again appears to be fully aware of the limits of his attacks, or perhaps to be more exact of his publisher's limits. That Britton

detested the monarchy is without question — like the tramp, he considered everyone who did not have a bona fide occupation, by his understanding of the expression, to be a parasite. However, his absence of attack on the monarchy seems to be an intentional omission. There is no mention of the euphemistic ‘His Nibs’ in the TS, although Britton says in the FC: ‘Even His Nibs has to do something to keep alive at all — if it’s only breathe. [...] If His Nibs doesn’t work he must have somebody to work for him. He couldn’t even write a cheque if somebody didn’t make the ink’ (FC p. 376). It seems reasonably clear that His Nibs is the king, although Britton has left sufficient ambiguity in the remark to permit it to pass any censor. In effect, though, these oblique references amount to self-censorship of the offending expressions, while at the same time the ambiguity is something he can hide inside, with impunity. Interestingly, the FC contains a sentence ‘We allow—how long shall we allow?—the disease blotches to represent mankind.’ In the corrected MG the question between the dashes above has been added, although a comment after ‘disease blotches’ ‘—kings, bishops, prime ministers—’ has been deleted (MG(R) p. 414, FC p. 238). There is no coloured pencil mark in the margin: the assumption must be that this is another example of Britton’s self-censorship. Perhaps the fear of another prison sentence — this time for treason — really *was* too much for him.

Putnam printed the manuscript verbatim, even incorporating Britton’s obvious typographical errors: there is, for example, a reference to ‘Stopford Brook’ as well as the correct ‘Stopford Brooke’, and ‘trouser’ is used twice for ‘trousers’ (FC pp. 39, 59, 131).

There are, then, a large number of differences between the early draft of the TS and the FC. One way in which Britton is altering the novel is aesthetically: the long sentences, often joined by semicolons or colons, now become separate sentences, infelicities of expression are altered, and Britton makes corrections to any factual inaccuracies. At the same time, he colloquializes his language. In so doing, he is creating a more lifelike and believable Arthur, someone whose thoughts appear on paper as though in segments as they

are actually thought, and not in the artificial manner of a grammatically correct sentence. One remarkable difference between the language of the TS and that of the FC is the degree of intensity of the language itself, particularly the insults towards those in authority: Britton seems to be working towards the means in which to express a working-class voice.

CHAPTER 3

Lionel Britton's Place in Working-Class Fiction

In this chapter my intention is to establish Lionel Britton's position in relation to working-class fiction, which I define as a literature — mainly in the form of novels here — which reflects working-class experience and is almost invariably, either implicitly or explicitly, in opposition to the middle-class status quo. With the exception of two translations of books from the original Russian by other writers, all of Britton's published work was in the 1930s, although *Hunger and Love* was mainly written in the 1920s. For this reason, I restrict the fictional works compared and contrasted with Britton's to those published during the inter-war years. I avoid the word 'proletarian' because it is now a dated expression, and was already regarded as such some years ago by one of the foremost authorities on working-class literature, H. Gustav Klaus, who describes it as being 'on the retreat'.¹ But during the period under consideration it was very much in vogue, and *Hunger and Love* itself, on the rear cover of the paperback edition of *Brain*, is advertised as: 'A great proletarian novel revolutionary in form and content.'² In its place I shall use the term 'working-class' as an adjectival, and the plural 'working classes' as a phrase which perhaps better describes their heterogeneous nature, and which also allows for the inclusion of minor non-manual categories of work. I sometimes use the expression 'internal working-class' — which was probably first used, although not defined, by Raymond Williams — to describe work written by people from working-class backgrounds with the interests of the working classes at

¹ *The Socialist Novel in Britain: Towards the Recovery of a Tradition*, ed. by H. Gustav Klaus (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1982), p. 1.

² [Lionel Britton (?)], *Brain*, rear cover.

heart.³ No matter how much or how little the boundaries between the working classes and the middle classes may have blurred between the inter-war years and the present day, it was then a time of great poverty for the working classes in general, and the emergent literature is a reflection of this.

The bulk of this chapter is the analysis of several working-class novels, and a few short stories in passing, in order to elucidate some ways in which these works are similar to and different from Britton's novel. I describe this literature as a sub-genre because it is operating within the framework of the dominant bourgeois novel and shares many features with it; the essential differences are thematic, and I therefore deal with the books thematically, referring to certain frequent working-class preoccupations, although it is not always possible to separate one preoccupation neatly from another. I conclude the chapter by briefly relating the realism of the working-class novel to working-class autobiographies, briefly explaining how *Hunger and Love* differs so much from other novels of its kind.

But I begin by giving a sweeping overview of working-class literature from the early nineteenth century, drawing on recent research over the last thirty years or so, continuing with a more thorough analysis of the working-class fiction of the inter-war years, and the prolific 1930s in particular. The main aim in this drive towards recovering lost working-class works of fiction was to salvage work long forgotten as a result of the dominance of the middle-class canon: as late as 1985 Klaus noted that, in spite of some research and conferences on the subject, it was an area which was still 'virtually ignored by literary scholars'.⁴ With the exception of perhaps four canonical working-class writers — Robert

³ Raymond Williams, 'The Welsh Industrial Novel', in *Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays* (London: Verso, 1980; repr. 1989), pp. 213–29 (p. 217).

⁴ H. Gustav Klaus, *The Literature of Labour: Two Hundred Years of Working-Class Writing* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1985), p. ix.

Tressell, Walter Greenwood, James Hanley and Lewis Grassic Gibbon — it was as though there had never been any others.

The beginnings of working-class fiction are far from easy to ascertain, although it would perhaps be logical to take 1832 as a starting point, as Ian Haywood does in *Working-class Fiction* (1997), because that is the date of the Reform Bill, when the government rejected calls for an extension of the franchise to the working classes; E. P. Thompson believes that the making of the working classes began as a result of this rejection: 'In every manufacturing district a hundred experiences confirmed the new consciousness of class which the Bill had [...] so carefully defined'.⁵ Chartist groups emerged, as did a number of working-class Chartist poets, although Klaus notes that 'the novel [was] very much a minority form, and particularly so during the first Chartist decade (1837–47)'.⁶ And although there were some Chartist novels written by middle-class writers such as Thomas Frost, G. W. M. Reynolds and Ernest Jones, there were hardly any internal working-class Chartist novels, and even of those few a novel by the significant working-class writer Thomas Cooper, Martha Vicinus notes, 'has not survived'.⁷ Ian Haywood calls Thomas Martin Wheeler's highly significant *Sunshine and Shadow* (1849–50) 'the first truly working-class novel', and understandably dismisses *Godfrey Malvern* (1843) by Thomas Miller, the (incidentally non-Chartist) former basket maker and childhood friend of Cooper's, because it is 'not about the working class'; however, he does not mention Miller's earlier *Gideon Giles: The Roper* (1841), which not only has working-class

⁵ Ian Haywood, *Working-class Fiction: From Chartism to Trainspotting* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1997); E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Gollancz, 1963; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), p. 908.

⁶ *The Literature of Labour*, p. 50.

⁷ Martha Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse: A Study of Nineteenth Century British Working-Class Literature* (London: Croom Helm, 1974), p. 121.

protagonists, but also contains some criticism of the inconsistent labour laws of the time.⁸ Essentially, *Gideon Giles* is not directly oppositional and contains some sentimentality which Louis James mentions, although James has a certain enthusiasm for a book which without doubt represents a significant beginning in the history of the internal working-class novel.⁹

A number of novels published around the middle of the nineteenth century — such as Disraeli's *Sybil* (1845), Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South* (1855), and Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854) — addressed the 'Condition of England' question by concentrating on the plight of the working classes, and some of these writers certainly influenced a number of internal working-class novelists: Haywood sees Walter Greenwood's *Love on the Dole* (1933), for instance, partly as a 'reworking' of *Mary Barton*.¹⁰

Later in the nineteenth century, significant bridges were being built between different political minorities: a number of middle-class women writers drew attention to the similarity between the position of women in general and that of the working classes. Ann Ardis writes about the forgotten Lady Florence Dixie's *Gloriana: or, the Revolution of 1900* (1890), a utopian novel in which a woman posing as a man becomes an M. P., reveals her true identity when threatened, and unites two minority groups (women and the working

⁸ *Working-class Fiction*, pp. 11, 161 n. 6; Thomas Miller, *Gideon Giles: The Roper* (London: Haywood, 1841; repr. Routledge, [n. d.]).

⁹ Louis James, *Fiction for the Working Man 1830–50: A Study of the Literature Produced for the Working Classes in Early Victorian Urban England* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), p. 123–24.

¹⁰ *Working-class Fiction*, p. 49.

classes) in a bloodless revolution in which she becomes the head of state.¹¹ And Brunhild de la Motte writes of the ‘striking phenomenon’ of working-class socialism supported — obviously to varying degrees — by such middle-class novelists as Constance Howell, Clementine Black, Emma Brooke, Gertrude Dix and Margaret Harkness.¹² Harkness is the most well known and probably the most influential in this list; a rector’s daughter to whom Engels wrote an important letter which I refer to in greater detail in the next chapter, she spent some time among the poor in Whitechapel and wrote several novels on the plight of the working classes; John Goode writes an article on her, and Ingrid von Rosenberg also discusses the novels of Harkness — along with those of W. E. Tirebuck (who was ‘born in Liverpool in “humble circumstances”’) — in relation to French naturalism.¹³ (It was not until towards the end of the nineteenth century and into the beginning of the twentieth that the ‘slum novel’ by naturalistic writers such as George Gissing and engine-fitter’s son Arthur Morrison appeared.)

H. Gustav Klaus has been mentioned previously, and his contribution to the recovery of working-class literature is of great importance: he was one of the first people to take a special interest in this field, and has written or edited several books on the subject. Between the beginning of the twentieth century and World War I, there were several internal working-class novelists, some of whose works Paul Salveson investigates in his

¹¹ Ann Ardis, “‘The Journey from Fantasy to Politics’: The Representation of Socialism and Feminism in *Gloriana* and *The Image-Breakers*”, in *Rediscovering Forgotten Radicals: British Women Writers, 1889–1939*, ed. by Angela Ingram and Daphne Patai (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, (c. 1993), pp. 43–56.

¹² Brunhild de la Motte, ‘Radicalism — Feminism — Socialism: The Case of the Women Novelists’, in *The Rise of Socialist Fiction 1880–1914*, ed. by H. Gustav Klaus (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1987), pp. 28–48 (p. 29).

¹³ John Goode, ‘Margaret Harkness and the Socialist Novel’, in *The Socialist Novel in Britain*, pp. 45–66; Ingrid von Rosenberg, ‘French Naturalism and the English Socialist Novel: Margaret Harkness and William Edwards Tirebuck’, in *The Rise of Socialist Fiction*, pp. 151–71 (p. 160).

essay in Klaus's *The Rise of Socialist Fiction*, thus contradicting the belief by some critics that there were no other working-class writers between the beginning of the twentieth century and 1914. Salvesson not only speaks of the popular Allen Clarke (perhaps better known as 'Teddy Ashton'), but also of other forgotten 'members' of the 'Lancashire school' of novelists who were encouraged by Clarke's socialist vehicle *Northern Weekly*, particularly Arthur Laycock (son of the Chartist poet Samuel), John Tamlyn, and Fred Plant.¹⁴ In the same book, J. M. Rignall analyses *The Handloom Weaver's Daughter* (1904) by the former factory worker James Haslam (another writer with associations with the Lancashire school), and Edmund and Ruth Frow give a brief account of mill worker Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's life and work.¹⁵

A few words, too, must be said about D. H. Lawrence (also mentioned in more detail below), whose novel of working-class life in a mining town — *Sons and Lovers* (1913) — influenced a number of working-class writers, not least Walter Brierley and F. C. Boden; both of these novelists lived near Eastwood where Lawrence was born, where he spent his youth, and on which he modelled Bestwood in his novel.

The year after the publication of *Sons and Lovers*, the only novel by Robert Tressell was published posthumously. *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (1914 (abridged edition) and 1955 (complete edition)), even when originally heavily edited by Jessie Pope for Grant Richards, became a seminal novel of working-class literature, and was long associated with the socialist principles of the original Labour Party.¹⁶ It is appropriate that Alan Sillitoe,

¹⁴ Paul Salvesson, 'Allen Clarke and the Lancashire School of Working-Class Novelists', in *The Rise of Socialist Fiction*, pp. 172–202.

¹⁵ J. M. Rignall, 'Struggles of the Past: Brushing History against the Grain', in *The Rise of Socialist Fiction*, pp. 99–120 (pp. 105–09); Edmund and Ruth Frow, 'Ethel Carnie: Writer, Feminist and Socialist', in *The Rise of Socialist Fiction*, pp. 251–66.

¹⁶ Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London: Richards (as 'Robert Tressall'), 1914; rev. and repr. Lawrence & Wishart, 1955; repr. Paladin, 1991).

the writer of the even better known internal working-class novel *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958), wrote an Introduction to a recent edition; and it is interesting to note that Sillitoe recalls being given Tressell's book by a wireless operator who described it as 'the book that won the '45 election for Labour'.¹⁷ This comment is obviously rather hyperbolic, but it is nevertheless indicative of the immense importance of *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, which is incidentally different from the vast majority of working-class works in that, like *Hunger and Love*, it too contains strong elements of humour.

Of the 1920s, Andy Croft quotes the miner Harold Heslop, speaking at the Conference of the International Union of Revolutionary Writers in 1927: 'proletarian art in Great Britain is in a very backward condition — and is in fact hardly begun'.¹⁸ Heslop's use of the word 'art' no doubt alludes to literature more than any other discipline, and few internal working-class novels emerged in this decade, although among the small number that did are James C. Welsh's *The Underworld* (1920) and *The Morlocks* (1924), Ellen Wilkinson's *Clash* (1929) and Harold Heslop's *The Gate of a Strange Field* (1929).¹⁹ The date that Carnie Holdsworth's *This Slavery* (1925) was actually written is open to question. Klaus finds that it 'clearly bears the mark of an earlier, in fact, pre-war composition', and John Lucas also suggests that publication of the novel was delayed; but Pamela Fox is less

¹⁷ Alan Sillitoe, Introduction, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, p. 7.

¹⁸ *Red Letter Days*, p. 31.

¹⁹ James C. Welsh, *The Underworld: The Story of Robert Sinclair: Miner* (London: Jenkins, 1920; repr. 1923); James C. Welsh, *The Morlocks* (London: Jenkins, 1924); Ellen Wilkinson, *Clash* (London: Harrap, 1929; repr. Virago Press, 1989); Harold Heslop, *The Gate of a Strange Field* (London: Brentano's, 1929; repr. New York: Appleton, 1929).

sceptical about a discrepancy between the date of writing and publication, believing that the novel shows ‘a narrative structure characteristic of later, class-conscious fiction’.²⁰

Klaus’s above quotation is in a chapter in which he analyses some neglected working-class novels from the 1920s, including some already quoted above.²¹ More significantly, in *Tramps, Workmates and Revolutionaries* (1993), Klaus re-published — along with works by a few writers who were to become well known in the 1930s — short stories from a few very obscure working-class writers of the decade, notably Dick Beech of Hull and R. M. Fox of London (who, like Britton, was imprisoned as a conscientious objector and also visited Russia).²² Klaus’s criteria for inclusion in his anthology are that none of the writers comes from the professional classes and that none of them received a public school or an Oxbridge education, although he admits that some readers might be ‘surprised, or alarmed’ by his inclusion of D. H. Lawrence and Katherine Mansfield.²³ Lawrence certainly came from a working-class background and so can with some justification be called a working-class writer; but Mansfield, whose father was a very successful businessman occupying a high position in New Zealand society, appears to be very much out of place in the company of ex-sailors and miners. But neither Lawrence nor Mansfield is in need of the recovery that is Klaus’s stated principal aim: both authors are far from forgotten. Klaus admits that stories of the working classes are not representative of Mansfield’s work, and appears to include her ‘Life of Ma Parker’ short story more because of its ‘power of

²⁰ *The Socialist Novel in Britain*, p. 94; John Lucas, *The Radical Twenties: Aspects of Writing, Politics and Culture*, (Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications, 1997), p. 158; Pamela A. Fox, ‘Ethel Carnie Holdsworth’s “Revolt of the Gentle”: Romance and the Politics of Resistance in Working-Class Women’s Writing’, in *Rediscovering Forgotten Radicals*, pp. 57–74, (pp. 73–74 n. 13).

²¹ H. Gustav Klaus, ‘Silhouettes of Revolution: Some Neglected Novels of the Early 1920s’, in *The Socialist Novel in Britain*, pp. 89–109.

²² *Tramps, Workmates and Revolutionaries: Working-Class Stories of the 1920s*, ed. by H. Gustav Klaus, (London: Journeyman Press, 1993).

²³ *Tramps, Workmates and Revolutionaries*, p. 1.

empathy' with a working-class woman than to redress the sex balance due to the shortage of working-class women writers in this anthology.²⁴ But there are nevertheless two (albeit very brief) stories by internal working-class women writers — Carnie Holdsworth's 'The Sheep' and Hannah Mitchell's 'May Day' — included in Klaus's book.²⁵

The reasons for this lack of women writers are obviously complex and largely irrelevant to this thesis, although Pamela Fox may well be close to the truth of the matter when she speaks of working-class fiction 'traditionally operat[ing] as a masculine genre, largely concerned with "public" and transformative experience' along with 'the overall masculinization of the Left'.²⁶ And Rebecca O'Rourke also has a strong argument when she writes of the male 'catalysing experiences', particularly unemployment, which 'generated writing', as opposed to the experiences of women, who are perceived as 'most fully of their class when silenced'.²⁷ The lack of representation for women in working-class fiction is in part compensated for by the feminism in Grassie Gibbon's *A Scots Quair* (1932–34), about which Alison Lumsden, for example, has recently written.²⁸

Until relatively recently, there was a surprising general ignorance of the existence of working-class fiction. At a Brighton Workers' Educational Association lecture in 1940, Virginia Woolf said: 'Take away all that the working class has given to English literature and that literature would scarcely suffer; take away all that the educated class has given,

²⁴ *Tramps, Workmates and Revolutionaries*, p. 2.

²⁵ *Tramps, Workmates and Revolutionaries*, pp. 87, 141–2.

²⁶ *Rediscovering Forgotten Radicals*, pp. 60, 71.

²⁷ Rebecca O'Rourke, 'Were There No Women?: British Working Class Writing in the Inter-war Period', *Literature and History*, 14 (1988), 48–63 (pp. 50, 52).

²⁸ Lumsden, Alison, "'Women's Time': Reading the *Quair* as a feminist text', in *A Flame in the Mearns: Lewis Grassie Gibbon: A Centenary Celebration*, ed. by Margery Palmer McCulloch and Sarah M. Dunnigan, 13 (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2003), pp. 41–53.

and English literature would scarcely exist.²⁹ Woolf was not speaking of any particular period in literary history, although she had just lived through the 1930s, a decade in which internal working-class literature burgeoned. Valentine Cunningham *does* cover a number of working-class writers, and although most of them he only mentions in passing, he at the same time acknowledges the importance of the authors' revelations and the regional diversity of their work. However, he gives most of them little critical coverage and, in spite of finding 'fine and moving' elements in Lewis Jones's two novels, he appears to apply the comment below to many working-class novels in general:

They nevertheless do not altogether avoid the faults of their sort: triteness and melodrama of plot, sentimental class chauvinism about workers, urgent dogmatisms, as well as a tendency to make the workers, especially members of the Communist Party, into men and women of excessive heroism and unbelievably steely militancy.³⁰

In general, the impression has to be that Cunningham is being dismissive of working-class literature.

Haywood names eighteen novelists that 'any survey must include'.³¹ His list appears to be in random order, so I re-list the authors geographically: James Barke, Joe Corrie and Lewis Grassie Gibbon (Scotland), Ralph Bates (Swindon), Simon Blumenfeld, Willie Goldman and John Sommerfield (London), Walter Brierley and F. C. Boden (the East Midlands), B. L. Coombes — who in fact never published a novel — and Lewis Jones (South Wales), Walter Greenwood, Jack Hilton (the Manchester area), Leslie Halward (Birmingham), James Hanley and Jim Phelan (Liverpool), Harold Heslop (the north-east), and Frank Tilsley (the north-west). Understandably, Ellen Wilkinson seems to be excluded because her only imaginative work after the 1920s was the crime novel *The Division Bell*

²⁹ 'The Leaning Tower', p. 112.

³⁰ Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 309.

³¹ *Working-Class Fiction*, p. 48.

Mystery (1932), although a few significant names could be added to the above list, such as William Holt (Yorkshire), the déclassé John Hampson (Birmingham), and Jack Jones (South Wales). (Gwyn Thomas's novels were not published until some years after the 1930s, and Kate Roberts's *Feet in Chains* was not translated into English until some time later either.) Interestingly, six of the writers Haywood lists were miners at some time, if not for the major part of their working lives.

Below I give a brief survey of the critical works about the working-class literature of the 1930s. I have mentioned some of them previously because most of them relate to a much broader period, and only one of these works specifically concerns only the 1930s.

One of the first books to cover a substantial number of working-class writers (along with a number of middle-class ones) is David Smith's *Socialist Propaganda in the Twentieth-Century British Novel* (1978).³² It is relatively short and contains a chapter on *A Scots Quair*, although it was perhaps unique at the time in that it also included a chapter specifically relating to the works of a number of internal working-class writers of the 1930s.³³

Worpole's *Dockers and Detectives* (1982) is also a significant early contribution to the recovery, and although its spectrum is broad it contains a section on the non-realist work of Jim Phelan, George Garrett, and James Hanley and a chapter largely concerned with the fiction of the East End in the 1930s.³⁴

Gustav Klaus's first English book on the subject is the previously mentioned *The Socialist Novel in Britain*, the title itself revealing how broad an area he covers; nevertheless, one contribution involves Ramón López Ortega's exploration of the use of

³² David Smith, *Socialist Propaganda in the Twentieth-Century British Novel* (London: Macmillan, 1978).

³³ *Socialist Propaganda in the Twentieth-Century British Novel*, pp. 57–76.

³⁴ Ken Worpole, *Dockers and Detectives: Popular Reading: Popular Writing* (London: Verso, 1982).

language in a number of the working-class novels of the 1930s.³⁵ Klaus's *The Literature of Labour* is even more extensive in that it covers two hundred years of working-class fiction, and also analyses songs, poems, and the documentarism of the 1930s and 1940s, although more relevant to the internal working-class fiction of the 1930s are two particular chapters: one on the work of Harold Heslop, and another analysing several working-class novels published in 1936. As with his essay on 1920s novels in *The Socialist Novel in Britain*, though, where works by the middle-class H. R. Barbor and Mary Agnes Hamilton are included, Klaus here too finds it necessary to analyse non-working-class writers sympathetic to the working-class cause, provoking Peter Hitchcock to ask: 'In what way can the specificity of working-class fiction be addressed if it is not written by the working class?'³⁶ This seems to be a crucial point, but is not a problem which arises in *British Industrial Fictions* (2000), edited jointly by Klaus and Stephen Knight with the principal purpose of drawing attention to the industrial and geographical diversity of working-class fiction, as the pluralized title indicates.³⁷ There are three chapters in this book which are relevant to the period on which this thesis concentrates: Simon Dentith's 'Tone of Voice in Industrial Writing in the 1930s', which is primarily concerned with *Love on the Dole*; Rolf Meyn's 'Lewis Jones's *Cwmardy* (1937) and *We Live* (1939)', and John Fordham's 'James Hanley's *The Furies*: Modernism and the Working Class'³⁸. Also edited

³⁵ Ramón López Ortega, 'The Language of the Working-Class Novel of the 1930s', in *The Socialist Novel in Britain*, pp. 122–144.

³⁶ Peter Hitchcock, *Working-Class Fiction in Theory and Practice: A Reading of Alan Sillitoe* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1989), p. 7.

³⁷ *British Industrial Fictions*, ed. by H. Gustav Klaus and Stephen Knight (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000).

³⁸ Simon Dentith, 'Tone of Voice in Industrial Writing in the 1930s', in *British Industrial Fictions*, pp. 99–111; Rolf Meyn, 'Lewis Jones's *Cwmardy* and *We Live*: Two Welsh Proletarian Novels in Transatlantic Perspective', in *British Industrial Fictions*, pp. 124–36; John Fordham, 'James Hanley's *The Furies*: Modernism and the Working Class', in *British Industrial Fictions*, pp. 112–23.

by Klaus and Knight is *'To Hell with Culture': Anarchism and Twentieth-Century British Literature* (2005), in which two essays cover a separate aspect of working-class literature in the 1930s: William K. Malcolm's, which extends his exploration of Grassie Gibbon's anarchism briefly touched on in *A Blasphemer & Reformer* (1984), and Raimund Schäffner's analysis of anarchism in the Spanish Civil War represented in Ralph Bates's *Lean Men* (1934) and *The Olive Field* (1936).³⁹

To return to other contributors to the critical work on working-class fiction, and necessarily backtrack a few years, Jeremy Hawthorn's *The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century* (1984) concentrates on individual working-class writers, although the contributors tend to adhere to the working-class canon: *A Scots Quair* and *Love on the Dole* are analysed, for example, and Lawrence is also covered.⁴⁰ As if to redress this canonical imbalance, Graham Holderness's article, 'Miners and the Novel: From Bourgeois to Proletarian Fiction', speaks of a 'dangerous concentration on a handful of texts which already seem doomed to canonization as the great tradition of proletarian fiction.'⁴¹ Perhaps a little surprisingly, though, he includes Lewis Jones along with Tressell

³⁹ William K. Malcolm, 'Art for Politics' Sake: The Sardonic Principle of John Leslie Mitchell (Lewis Grassie Gibbon)', in *'To Hell with Culture': Anarchism and Twentieth-Century British Literature*, ed. by H. Gustav Klaus and Stephen Knight (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), pp. 35–50; William K. Malcolm, *A Blasphemer & Reformer: A Study of J. Leslie Mitchell/Lewis Grassie Gibbon* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1984), pp. 18–21; Raimund Schäffner, 'Ralph Bates and the Representation of the Spanish Anarchists in *Lean Men* and *The Olive Field*', in *'To Hell with Culture'*, pp. 66–81; Ralph Bates, *Lean Men: An Episode in a Life* (London: Davies, 1934); Ralph Bates, *The Olive Field* (London: Cape, 1936; repr. The Hogarth Press, 1986).

⁴⁰ *The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Jeremy Hawthorn (London: Arnold, 1984).

⁴¹ Graham Holderness, 'Miners and the Novel: From Bourgeois to Proletarian Fiction', in *The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 19–34 (p. 19).

and Grassie Gibbon in this canon, but then goes on to analyse Walter Brierley's more obscure *Means Test Man* (1935).⁴²

It would be very difficult not to mention Andy Croft's role in the general recovery of working-class writing: his *Red Letter Days: British Fiction in the 1930s*, along with his other critical work, is another vital part of the move to recover forgotten working-class texts. His Preface is in part a criticism of what for him (in the early 1980s) was a limited and limiting list of books accepted into the Labour Party's collective heart; the Preface is also in part a mission statement of what his book is, namely:

[A] contribution to the process of restoration, to help make forgotten achievements known and available, to paint in some of the faces removed from the picture, to lengthen the reading-lists, widen the syllabuses, open the book-boxes of the canon, still largely untouched by all the energetic republishing.⁴³

The reference to 'paint[ing] in some of the faces removed from the picture' is an obvious allusion to Stalin's attempts to airbrush the likes of Trotsky from history, and the analogy fits particularly well with the effective disappearance of working-class writers from literary history. Nevertheless, the project sounds a little over-ambitious, although Croft was writing at a time when the British left was strong and there was a great optimism, this being when publishing houses such as Virago, Lawrence and Wishart, and Caliban were introducing forgotten texts to a new public. Today, though, many of these new publications — a large number of which contained informative new Introductions (some by Croft himself) with biographical and bibliographical details of the authors — are now out of print, and some are even more difficult to find than the first editions. *Red Letter Days* is an extended version of Croft's PhD thesis of 1985, obviously with a more popular and polemical slant,

⁴² Walter Brierley, *Means Test Man* (London: Methuen, 1935; repr. Nottingham: Spokesman, 1983).

⁴³ *Red Letter Days*, p. 10.

and wears its political heart on its sleeve. Unfortunately, as with almost all critical works up to this date, in both the thesis and the book, working-class writers mingle freely with middle-class socialist sympathisers, often unannounced, and it is by no means clear from which class a writer originates; furthermore, the (often very obscure) books are frequently mentioned some chapters later on, with no reminder of their author, and titles in the Index are given under the name of the author as opposed to the title of the novel: this is a major critical work about 1930s working-class fiction, but unfortunately the overall effect is confusing.

Finally, Ian Haywood's brief study, *Working-class Fiction: From Chartism to Trainspotting*, in the 'Writers and their Work' series, is necessarily limited in size, although unlike *Red Letter Days* it *does* restrict itself to internal working-class writers, making it a very valuable general reference guide. *Working-class Fiction* is a whistle-stop tour of the sub-genre from the 1840s to the 1990s, and although its principal strength, perhaps, is in its analysis of long-forgotten works by writers such as Thomas Martin Wheeler and Allen Clarke, the inter-war years are given a significant coverage which occupies almost fifty pages, and although ten of those pages are dedicated to *Love on the Dole*, five to well-known works by James Hanley, and a few to *A Scots Quair*, many other authors are included. One point of interest is that Haywood's book contains a paragraph about one of the few white-collar writers of the working classes, Frank Tilsley, although only *A Plebeian's Progress* (1933) is dealt with out of several novels that Tilsley wrote in the 1930s.⁴⁴

The most significant point about these critical works — at least for the purpose of my thesis — is that Lionel Britton, who wrote so extensively of Arthur Phelps's exclusion, is himself almost completely excluded from all of the critical works on working-class

⁴⁴ Frank Tilsley, *The Plebeian's Progress* (London: Gollancz, 1933; repr. Severn House, 1976).

literature. There is no mention of Britton in Worpole, Hawthorn or Haywood.

Perhaps somewhat bizarrely, in his Introduction to *Socialist Propaganda in the Twentieth-Century British Novel*, David Smith excludes *Hunger and Love* from his catalogue of socialist propaganda because it 'rail[s] against the system [...] but [...] fail[s] to proffer any radical alternative'.⁴⁵ Croft lists a number of objections to Smith's excluding such people as Britton and Greenwood (who is also excluded by Smith for the same reason), concluding with: 'Above all, [Smith's] criticism fails to take into account the psychological and the political effects of unemployment upon the unemployed themselves, fails to recognize the experience of defeat that is involved.'⁴⁶ Britton's novel clearly signals a belief in the importance of a kind of anarchist society as opposed to the cut-throat individualism of the existing competitive one, and goes to some lengths to suggest alternatives to the prevailing discourse; it seems likely that Smith excluded *Hunger and Love* because the narrator is not committing himself (or the protagonist) to any specific (party) political line.

Britton does not appear in the Index *Red Letter Days*, although the book does have two very brief endnotes concerning *Hunger and Love*: the first is about Britton's exclusion from Smith's book, the other Garry's negative review of it in the communist *Daily Worker* mentioned in Chapter 1.⁴⁷ In passing, Valentine Cunningham mentions 'Lionel Brittan' (*sic*), although he only does so as an introduction to commenting on Orwell's *nostalgie de la boue*.⁴⁸ But the most extreme case of Britton's exclusion must be in Stuart Laing's article in Frank Gloversmith's *Class, Culture and Social Change* (1980), where a four-line quotation is given from Orwell's 1940 radio broadcast. The radio programme is relevant to

⁴⁵ *Socialist Propaganda in the Twentieth-Century British Novel*, p. 2.

⁴⁶ Andrew Croft, 'Socialist Fiction in Britain in the 1930s', University of Nottingham PhD thesis, 1985.

⁴⁷ *Red Letter Days*, pp. 93, 266.

⁴⁸ Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 245.

this chapter as it is about the working-class novel, and in it Orwell specifically singles out *Hunger and Love* — with some reservations — as ‘an outstanding book’ of the sub-genre.⁴⁹ It is remarkable that Orwell remembers the book so vividly from when he reviewed it for the *Adelphi* almost ten years previously, but it is even more remarkable that Laing simply refers to the quotation — which is exclusively about *Hunger and Love* — as concerning ‘one particular novel’, and mentions neither the author nor the title.⁵⁰ And yet it can be argued that Britton had an influence of Orwell’s work; *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936) has a number of moments which could easily have been inspired by Britton, although the example below from *Coming Up for Air* (1939) seems to bear the distinct hallmark of Britton’s writing style: the enumeration, the (rather ironically intended in this case) conspiracy theory and the sense of urgency all suggest a pastiche of Britton’s *Hunger and Love*:

And all the soul-savers and Nosey Parkers, the people whom you’ve never seen but who rule your destiny all the same, the Home Secretary, Scotland Yard, the Temperance League, the Bank of England, Lord Beaverbrook, Hitler and Stalin on a tandem bicycle, the bench of Bishops, Mussolini, the Pope—they were all of them after me. I could almost hear them shouting:

‘There’s a chap who thinks he’s going to escape! There’s a chap who says he won’t be streamlined! He’s going back to Lower Binfield! After him! Stop him!’⁵¹

There is a very strong case for including Britton as a writer of a genuine working-class novel. Those who had seen him as well as read him accepted automatically that he was an important working-class writer: Jean Macgibbon calls him ‘one of the earliest significant

⁴⁹ *A Patriot After All*, pp. 295–99 (p. 297).

⁵⁰ Stuart Laing, ‘Presenting “Things as They Are”: John Sommerfield’s *May Day* and Mass Observation’, in *Class, Culture and Social Change: A New View of the 1930s*, ed. by Frank Gloversmith (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1980), pp. 142–60 (p. 144).

⁵¹ George Orwell, *Coming up for Air* (London: Gollancz, 1939; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), pp. 173–74.

working-class writers', and similarly, the novelist and acquaintance of Britton, Mollie Morris, called him 'a proletarian visionary'.⁵²

And Britton was of course seen as working class by newspaper reviewers and critics. William Empson calls *Hunger and Love* 'one of the few ostensibly proletarian works of any energy that England has to show', although he believes that Britton really wants 'the opportunity not to be proletarian'.⁵³ J. F. Horrabin is much more positive about Britton's working-class status, claiming that *Hunger and Love* 'is as proletarian, as real-true-proletarian, as *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* or *Singing Jail-birds*' (a play by Upton Sinclair), and Philip Henderson also agrees with this, linking Britton to two canonical working-class writers: 'The novels of Lionel Britton, James Hanley and Walter Greenwood may be taken as fairly representative of the voice of the emergent British working class to date.'⁵⁴

In what has survived of a long commentary on *Hunger and Love* that was written by Constant Huntington as an Introduction to the novel before Russell wrote his, there is the following observation:

Lionel Britton comes of the lower orders of which he writes, so that he is obviously speaking of the things he knows. This authentic character of the book has indeed been commented on almost without exception by every reviewer and everyone who has read the book.⁵⁵

⁵² Jean Macgibbon, *I Meant to Marry Him: A Personal Memoir* (London: Gollancz, 1984), p. 108; Mollie Morris, 'When All the Trees Were Green', unpublished autobiography in the possession of Barbara Cast, [c. 1980s], p. 38.

⁵³ William Empson, 'Proletarian Literature', *Scrutiny*, March 1935, 332–38 (p. 335), LBC, Box 12, Folder 11.

⁵⁴ J. F. Horrabin, "'Hunger and Love': A Real Proletarian Novel", *Plebs*, September 1931, pp. 210–11; Philip Henderson, 'The Crisis in Twentieth-Century Literature — IV: Middle-Class Communists and Proletarian Writers', *Eleventh Hour*, 12 June 1935, pp. 91–92 (p. 92), LBC, Box 12, Folder 11.

⁵⁵ [C. J. Huntington], 'Hunger and Love', p. [6].

Huntington makes no exaggeration here, and words such as ‘true’ and ‘authentic’ abound in reviews of Britton’s work.

Britton too associated himself with the working classes: the titles of two articles he wrote, ‘An Errand-Boy’s Philosophy’ and ‘The Mind of a Ragamuffin’, are revealing: he is associating two ‘types’ — normally linked with a low level of the working classes — with cerebral matters.⁵⁶ In these articles, Britton states that he believes that the main obstacles to the intellectual development of the working classes are people in a position of authority, and says of his childhood: ‘I did not like everyday life. [...] They wanted to force me to accept it. I despised them. But most of all I despised them because they insisted that I — we — must not be intellectual’.⁵⁷ Britton is adopting a stance that aligns himself with the working classes, at the same time as he is occupying a political position which assumes that the intellect is the main weapon for them to use against the middle classes. As he reveals a few days later of his former school, ‘elementary education seemed to me one wild shriek of fear lest we should become too clever for them’.⁵⁸ Britton admits that he may not then have been able to express this idea in quite the same words as he can now, but that he ‘could not help sensing something’. He is evidently constructing an autobiographical basis on which to found his conspiracy theory. He intended his work to reach a large audience, and in a letter to Acheson from Moscow states: ‘I can’t write for a few individuals, but only for the masses. Of course, in England I should say “the world”, but that’s not an idea that’s very understandable in Russia.’⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Lionel Britton, ‘An Errand-Boy’s Philosophy’, *Star*, 29 April 1930, [n. p.], LBC, Box 12, Folder 11; ‘The Mind of a Ragamuffin’.

⁵⁷ ‘An Errand-Boy’s Philosophy’.

⁵⁸ ‘The Mind of a Ragamuffin’.

⁵⁹ Lionel Britton, letter to Sinead Acheson, 17 July 1935, LBC, Box 2, Folder 12, pp. [2–3].

But my main concern in this chapter, as previously stated, is to address the similarities (and differences) between Britton's work and that of other working-class writers. In his short study of James Kelman, Klaus, through a process of detailing the features usually associated with working-class literature but which are missing from Kelman's post-industrial writing, comes close to listing most of the key features of the working-class inter-war novel (and other periods) in general:

[O]ne looks in vain here for the exceptionally gifted working-class figure, the fighter for the Cause, the working-class hearth and home, the diurnal family life, the archetypal industrial setting, the communal action that were the stock-in-trade of the traditional working-class novel.⁶⁰

With the obvious exception of the very gifted Phelps, who was also a kind of fighter for a cause, the same comment about Klaus's list could be made about *Hunger and Love*: there is certainly no domestic cosiness, no industrial setting, and very little communal action. To these absences, though, Klaus adds the features which *are* present in Kelman's work: 'the workless and the homeless, the casually and the menially employed, the cadgers and the dodgers, in short the powerless marginalized section of the working class'. It would be very easy to argue a case to include Phelps and some characters in *Hunger and Love* in these groups.

Before moving into an analysis of my chosen texts, it is first advisable to point out that, although I have stated that working-class literature is essentially oppositional, there are some works by internal working-class writers that act against this general rule. Caradoc Evans's *My People* (1915) is a bitter attack on the Welsh and is described as 'savagely bleak' by Rhys Davies in his idiosyncratic part-autobiography, *Print of a Hare's Foot* (1969); furthermore, Richard Llewellyn's *How Green Was my Valley* (1939), in essence a sentimental novel, contains non-, indeed anti-, oppositional material which is critical of

⁶⁰ H. Gustav Klaus, *James Kelman* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2004), pp. 5–6.

trade unions.⁶¹ There was never a homogeneous working-class school of writing, even if some writers may have felt obliged to adhere to the Soviet line for fear of exclusion.

In order to establish ways in which *Hunger and Love* is similar to the working-class literature of the time, I shall examine several areas, not all of which are mentioned in Klaus's *James Kelman*, but which are nevertheless prominent in this literature: the description of work, unemployment and money, the treatment of gender and birth control, reading, shame and the feeling of being watched, and the criticism of society as a whole. The main novels I refer to are Wilkinson's *Clash*, Harold Heslop's *The Gate of a Strange Field*, Walter Brierley's *Means Test Man* (1935) and *Sandwichman* (1937), Frank Tilsley's *The Plebeian's Progress* and *She Was There Too* (1938), and James Hanley's *Drift* (1930).⁶² None of these works is a 'canonical' working-class novel. Significantly, as with *Hunger and Love*, all have some autobiographical content, sometimes very strongly so.

One of the earliest articles that was part of the recovery of working-class fiction was Roy Johnson's 'The Proletarian Novel', which in spite of some criticisms of working-class literature does make a very valid point. After stating that the 'novels' *Means Test Man* and B. L. Coombes's *These Poor Hands* (1939) — the latter of which Coombes sub-titles 'The Autobiography of a Miner Working in South Wales', and which Andy Croft labels a 'documentary' — 'fall into the trap of being over-naturalistic accounts of life in mining communities', Johnson concedes that 'most middle-class writers have excluded from their

⁶¹ Caradoc Evans, *My People: Stories of the Peasantry of West Wales* (London: Melrose, 1915; repr. (with short title only) Bridgend: Seren, 1987); Rhys Davies, *Print of a Hare's Foot: An Autobiographical Beginning* (London: Heinemann, 1969), p. 116; Richard Llewellyn, *How Green Was my Valley* (London: Joseph, 1939; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1951).

⁶² Walter Brierley, *Sandwichman* (London: Methuen, 1937); Frank Tilsley, *She Was There Too* (London: Collins, 1938); James Hanley, *Drift* (London: Partridge, 1930).

novels the subject which dominates much working-class fiction — work itself'.⁶³

One central function of working-class literature is evidently to redress this balance.

In a chapter concerning the working-class novel, it is hardly possible to ignore the contribution of many writers to the literature of mining because so many novels concern this industry and are frequently set inside the pit in many scenes. Arthur Phelps, who works in the book trade throughout almost all of *Hunger and Love*, has no obvious immediate relevance here, although Britton calls one of his chapters 'Mind-Mining' in self-conscious acknowledgement of the fact that he is actually writing a working-class novel, albeit with the emphasis on cerebral matters (pp. 7–11); furthermore, Britton's interest in dramatizing Gwyn Jones's mining novel *Times Like These* (mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis) indicates an interest in working-class literature in general. Another mining novel is Harold Heslop's first book to be published in Britain, *The Gate of a Strange Field*, which is a good example of the concerns of the working-class literature of the time, and which was written at about the same period that Britton was working on *Hunger and Love*.

Among the similarities between *Hunger and Love* and *The Gate of a Strange Field* are the love of freedom and the idea of work as slavery. At the beginning of Heslop's novel, fourteen-year-old Joe Tarrant is understandably only dimly aware of the horrors of repetitive work: 'He did not know that the shackles of industry had him fast. He was not conscious of the term, slavery.'⁶⁴ And like Harry Hardcastle in *Love on the Dole* when he begins working at Marlowe's engineering factory, Tarrant's youthful enthusiasm makes him initially consider his first job to be an adventure, a kind of exploration. But a little time

⁶³ Roy Johnson, 'The Proletarian Novel', *Literature and History*, 2 (1975), 84–95 (p. 90); B. L. Coombes, *These Poor Hands: The Autobiography of a Miner Working in South Wales* (London: Gollancz, 1939); *Red Letter Days*, p. 91.

⁶⁴ *The Gate of a Strange Field*, pp. 13–14.

later, when Tarrant describes the beginning of his day down the mine itself, there is no longer any sense of adventure:

Having received his lamp he proceeds to the inner room where he is given an identification token, a piece of metal upon which is inscribed a number, which he gives back on ascending the pit. Then he passes the lamp tester. Here the lamp is blown so as to make sure that there is no access between the outer atmosphere and the flame, except by the correct place. Then the lamp is put into a gas chamber where it is extinguished. It is then re-lit and the miner is at liberty to pass through the ventilation doors leading to the actual mine-head.⁶⁵

The passage is part of a brief switch to the present tense to convey a sense of both immediacy and regularity, although the frequent use of the passive voice makes it much more powerful, accentuating an impression of impersonal, almost depersonalized, bourgeois formality underlined by such words as 'proceeds', 'ascending' and 'extinguished'. It is almost as if the narrator is describing a scientific experiment, or the actions of automata. The really chilling presence in the passage, which is enhanced by the oddly ceremonious language, is not fully expressed, although the identification token (which bears an impersonal number rather than a name) makes it plain: there is an ever-present possibility of death in the miner's world. Furthermore, the above quotation also obviously records an autobiographical experience; Heslop worked at Horton colliery in South Shields for fifteen years, and the reference to pit ponies putting their heads deep into their water troughs to avoid the dust and beetles on the surface is another example of a special kind of knowledge. This is insider knowledge, perhaps appearing in a detailed list or a sequence of numbers, and it is frequent in working-class fiction. Phelps has access to this kind of knowledge, such as

⁶⁵ *The Gate of a Strange Field*, p. 24.

in his detailing of book sizes and conditions: 'the interminable cr. 8vo, roy. 8vo, 12mo, old calf re-backed, fine tall copy, few worm-holes in margin' (p. 350).

And in the working-class novel, it is not only work that is detailed and catalogued in this fashion: often, the slender means by which the working classes live and eke out their existence is seen in the overriding importance of money, with every penny being vital. In *She Was There Too*, money becomes a prime concern as Ethel Reynolds approaches the end of her pregnancy. She writes a meticulously itemized list of expenses which is read by her husband Joe:

Rent was at the top: 14/6; Coal, 2/9; Bread, 2/6; Meat, 3/6; Milk, 1/10; Vegetables and fruit, 2/3; Laundry — bed things, 3/3; Gas meter, 2/-; Electric meter, 1/-; Fish, 1/2; Groceries 6/5. Insurances, 1/2; Papers, 10d.; Clothing club, 2/-. That came to £2.5.2. Underneath, Ethel had written: Shoe repairs, 2/3; Flannel, 3/-.⁶⁶

Means Test Man too is full of small details similar to those found in *Hunger and Love* and *She Was There Too*, particularly relating to money. Jack, for example, finds that he can avoid paying the tuppence stamp duty levied on withdrawals in excess of two pounds from 'the Co-op' by simply withdrawing only £1 19s 11d. And on buying mother-of-pearl buttons from Woolworth's, the change he receives from a one pound note is detailed exactly: 'a ten-shilling note, four florins, a shilling, a sixpence, a threepenny-piece and a penny'.⁶⁷ Money is often represented metaphorically or symbolically, but here its pure materiality, its vital importance, is dwelt upon. And the narrator also dwells on the frugality of the Cooks' existence, detailing exactly how they spend the twenty-five shillings and threepence 'dole' money Jack is given each week, including Jane buying off-cuts of meat on Saturdays, and waiting until the final

⁶⁶ *She Was There Too*, p. 96.

⁶⁷ *Means Test Man*, p. 176.

hour to buy perishable foodstuffs because she knows that the seller, fearing having ruined stock on his hands by Monday, will be forced to lower the price.

Stealing is a possible short-term escape from money problems, and Tilsley's protagonists in *The Plebeian's Progress* and *I'd Do It Again* (1936) show very different attitudes towards the subject.⁶⁸ In the former, Allen has attempted to steal before, although his conscience defeated him; at the accountants where he works, he steals ten shillings from the safe but then puts the money back, immediately criticizing himself for doing so: 'He laughed shortly: inverted kleptomania!...What a weak-kneed simp he was! An unpractical dreamer; a third-rate nonentity; a coward, coward, *coward!*'⁶⁹ This is similar to two occasions in *Hunger and Love*: when Arthur is forced to end his employment with Skillick, he also secretly pays back the price of two books he has stolen, and in an incident mentioned in the previous chapter, in which he takes a sixpence from the stairs, Arthur's guilt is so strong that he feels obliged to pay it back indirectly by claiming fewer expenses for bus fares. But it is his repeated words, echoing Allen's internal monologue, which are more memorable than his actions: 'Thief thief thief thief thief thief' (p. 65). Allen's stealing leads to destitution, murdering his wife, and being consequently hanged, but the anonymous first-person narrator in *I'd Do It Again* feels no such guilt; it seems almost as though the later novel were written to dispel any suggestion that *The Plebeian's Progress* is a warning about the negative consequences of stealing because in this the serial thief not only escapes with impunity, but would, as the title suggests, readily repeat his crimes.

Inevitably, as in so many working-class novels, there is a debilitating spell of unemployment in *The Plebeian's Progress*, when the novel echoes some of Phelps's problems with his worn-out clothes, even when he is employed: the nails in Allen's worn-out shoes cause him discomfort when he walks, Anne darns his socks many times over,

⁶⁸ Frank Tilsley, *I'd Do It Again* (London: Collins, 1936; repr. Baker, 1969).

⁶⁹ *The Plebeian's Progress*, p. 147.

and uses newspaper to prevent the bones in her corsets from cutting into her flesh.

Absurdly, the need for economy defeats even the possible escape by suicide in 'The Cleft Stick', the eponymous short story in Greenwood's book in which Cranfield is only intermittently employed; the maddened, poverty-stricken Mrs Cranfield lays her head in the oven and realizes that she has not turned on the gas: 'She would turn on the gas, die, and would not be able to turn it off again ... and the gas would still be escaping, costing money, until someone should come in to turn it off. "No, no," she repeated, shaking her head: "I couldn't afford it."'"⁷⁰

Working-class literature frequently depicts a world in which shame and degradation battle with pride. When unemployed, Arthur Gardner in *Sandwichman* insists on still paying in full for his board at home, which means making use of his meagre bank savings. And the means test man, a major source of shame, plays a role in both of Brierley's early novels. As the narrator observes of the means test man on being ordered to leave by Gardner's extremely proud stepfather:

On occasions he had had people who refused to answer some of the questions, or disclose particulars of income, but they usually did it merely with words and a tone which said plainly that if benefit could come to them only through uncovering the nakedness of their living, they'd do without it.⁷¹

In this case, the nakedness is obviously figurative and relates to the exposure of limited financial resources. But in *Means Test Man*, an analogy is made between the means test and the literal sense of nakedness. As the title of the novel suggests, the means test man has a greater significance than in the earlier book, and the revealing of Jack and Jane's expenses has a devastating effect on Jane: 'She felt sick, full of misery and

⁷⁰ Walter Greenwood, *The Cleft Stick; or, 'It's the Same the World Over'* (London: Selwyn & Blount, 1937; repr. New York: Stokes, 1938), p. 60.

⁷¹ *Sandwichman*, p. 254.

shame, as if she were standing naked before decent men and women'.⁷² Phelps, though, would never have made such an analogy: he sleeps naked and is happy to do so; and as mentioned previously, Britton's (partial) utopia *Brain* is peopled by gladly unclad characters, and Britton himself delighted in nakedness and used to boast, for instance, that he never wore pyjamas. (On the same theme, it is also significant to see how differently public nakedness is treated by Grassie Gibbon and Rhys Davies as well as Britton, as discussed in Chapter 6.)

Sometimes partly associated with shame is the frequent concern of characters in the working-class novel that they are being watched. Pat Barker's aptly titled *The Eye in the Door* (1993) has some instances in a prison cell where the warder's spy hole is mentioned, and in *A Question of Conscience: Conscientious Objection in the Two World Wars* (1997), Felicity Goodall quotes former prisoner Harold Bing: 'the warder could come along and open the spyhole and spy on you at any time to see what you were up to so that you had the sense of being watched the whole time'.⁷³ Quite possibly, Britton experienced similar events while he was in prison and attempted to reproduce the sensation in *Hunger and Love*, where Phelps is fully aware that his activities are being spied on, and the reader sees intimations of Foucault's panopticon: 'old Morning-Suit, when he's not nosing round, sits in glass cage at one end where he can see your every movement. Nowhere to hide'; for Phelps, of course, the problem of being watched extends to any figure of authority (p. 588). And this feeling is to some extent based on reality as opposed to an irrational fear of persecution: in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, for example, this normally occurs in the workplace, when the men have to appear never to be taking an unscheduled break, and constantly have to ensure that they are not caught slacking by employers or foremen.

⁷² *Means Test Man*, p. 261.

⁷³ Felicity Goodall, *A Question of Conscience: Conscientious Objection in the Two World Wars* (Stroud: Sutton, 1997), p. 28.

Certainly the unemployed are not exempt from this treatment, as Brierley makes clear in *Means Test Man*, where the narrator is speaking about the employment bureau: 'the very presence of the manager or supervisor brought a silence about the rank, there was a kind of fear that a word might bring official eyes on them to their detriment'.⁷⁴ For Joe Rourke in *Drift*, who is also unemployed, it is mainly his parents who watch him: 'My mother! And father! [...] acted like dirty low-down filthy spies — watched my every move'.⁷⁵ And it is not only his parents who watch him. As with Phelps, the feeling that there is 'nowhere to hide' cannot be shaken off, perhaps particularly when Rourke strives to disengage himself from the tyranny of the religious hypocrisy of his parents, such as during the memorable scene when he is engaged in sex with his prostitute lover:

'Well!' He heard a great voice, a voice of bronze which seemed to strike the earth with a great metallic clang. Again it sounded in his ears. 'Well!' Ah yes, he knew that voice — he could see that face, he saw that arm. That was God! He had not escaped. He had been seen.'⁷⁶

It is significant that religion should be presented here as an obstacle to sex, because throughout *Drift* there are various references to gender in relation to Rourke and religion: he is seen as not being a man because he will not stand up to his parents' religious obsessions. At one point in the book, Rourke says: 'I am a Catholic no longer, but a man at last.'⁷⁷ The words are in vain, though, because his inability to forget either his religion or his parents ultimately leads to his lover leaving him.

Gender is a major concern throughout the literature of the pre- and post-war period. The New Woman and the push for the enfranchisement of women had been seen as a threat to patriarchy, but it was perhaps particularly during World War I and its aftermath that

⁷⁴ *Means Test Man*, pp. 168–69.

⁷⁵ *Drift*, p. 246.

⁷⁶ *Drift*, p. 105.

⁷⁷ *Drift*, p. 180.

women were considered to be more threatening than ever. During the war, many women had been employed in occupations often formerly reserved exclusively for men; the franchise was extended to a limited number of women in 1918, with equal enfranchisement with men following ten years later. In the critical feminist trilogy *No Man's Land* (1987–94), Gilbert and Gubar note the effect of women's increasing freedom on the male-authored literature of the time: 'Images of impotence recur with unnerving frequency in the most canonical male modernist novels and poems.'⁷⁸ They also say that 'the war functioned in so many different ways to liberate women', which is indisputable, although not necessarily in the same ways with different classes.⁷⁹ Because of the strong working-class emphasis on gender stereotypes, changes were arguably more strongly felt by the working classes, and these gender differences are logically reflected in working-class literature. Areas in which this has a special concern for the working classes include unemployment and the attendant lack of money, and birth control (or the lack of knowledge of it). In *Means Test Man* one of the unemployed has a feeling of uselessness: 'Ar reckon it's the rottenest thing ert. Yo dunna know wot ta dew'.⁸⁰ Unemployment has an emasculating effect which is plainly visible in Jack Cook: 'About all his movements there was the gentleness of a woman, on his face as he arranged the bed-clothes was the pleasurable love-of-caring one sees in a mother'; and those still in work regard him in the same light: 'To the miners he would have become a woman'.⁸¹ For his wife, only working men seem to be real.

⁷⁸ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*, 3 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987–94), I: *The War of the Worlds*, 35.

⁷⁹ *No Man's Land*, II: *Sexchanges* (1988), p. 318.

⁸⁰ *Means Test Man*, p. 172.

⁸¹ *Means Test Man*, pp. 9, 23.

In *Hunger and Love*, though, it is not unemployment that defines Phelps's gender problems: it is simply that women are always in a superior position to him, whether it is Miss Whyman teasing him sexually and earning more money than him, the various prostitutes with whom he comes into contact, or his girlfriend Doreen whom he will never be able to marry because he will never find himself in a financial position to be able to support a wife. Early in the novel, he contents himself with surreptitiously buying *Photo Bits* every Saturday and locking himself in his room with it: 'gloat in secrecy, imaginary nudity: sham, substitute stuff', and his later dalliances with prostitutes are seen to be equally inauthentic (p. 71).

Birth control in the internal working-class novel is an interesting source of comment on the nature of gender and class, and is the source of much discord between the sexes. Dora Russell was a prominent advocate of birth control in the inter-war years, particularly among the working classes, and mentions that the M. P. and novelist Ellen Wilkinson was also interested in the subject.⁸² It was common for birth control advocates to sell pamphlets such as Margaret Sanger's *Family Limitation* (c. 1914) in London, and the mention in Wilkinson's *Clash* of 'The inevitable mild middle-class lady' giving out 'leaflets on birth control' is evidently indicative of the mood of the period.⁸³ Also, a number of birth control clinics were established in British cities, although for various reasons ignorance of the issue continued to exist, and the women of the working-class Yorkshire town of Shireport in *Clash* — based on Middlesbrough, where Wilkinson's parliamentary seat was, and where the fictional union organizer Joan Craig has been sent — anxiously inform Craig of this. One of them says: 'What the women in this place want is to know how to stop having any more babies while we're all so poor', and another blames socialist M. P.s for being

⁸² Dora Russell, *The Tamarisk Tree: My Quest for Liberty and Love* (London: Elek, 1975; repr. Virago Press), p. 173.

⁸³ *Clash*, p. 26.

worried about losing the Roman Catholic vote, which is something Sheila

Robotham mentions in her biography of Stella Browne, *A New World for Women* (1977).⁸⁴

Essentially the problem is perceived as a question of class, as one of the working-class women in *Clash* says to a middle-class woman: 'Your class keep us women in ignorance and then you treat us as though we had committed a crime when we have another baby that you won't tell us how to prevent.'⁸⁵ (The above observation is very similar to Britton's comment on education in general, and the paradoxical nature of the middle-class discourse in relation to the lives of the working class here is very close to that of Phelps's and one of Jean Rhys's protagonist's mentioned in Chapter 5.)

Frank Tilsley mentions birth control in at least two of his novels of the 1930s. In *The Plebeian's Progress*, Allen leaves his bride Anne for about fifteen minutes without telling her where he is going, but he sees 'big glass bowls of coloured water' in an unidentified shop, and this, added to the knowledge that he avoids it because there are customers in it, and avoids another because of the female assistant in it, are the only indications that he wants to buy a packet of contraceptives from a barber's shop.⁸⁶ This behaviour could be dismissed as a simple representation of sexual inexperience in the 1930s, but Allen never really exhibits much 'masculinity' in the novel, particularly in the early part of the book. He considers Anne to be unusually 'frigid', and for a time the pair lapse into an almost sexless marriage, quite the reverse of what Allen had foreseen: 'He had imagined her tender, submissive (God knows what he'd been dreaming about), and himself exultant, masterful'.⁸⁷ *She Was There Too* — the title of which is a reference to conception — is

⁸⁴ *Clash*, pp. 245, 248; Sheila Rowbotham, *A New World for Women: Stella Browne: Socialist Feminist* (London: Pluto Press, 1977), pp. 48, 36.

⁸⁵ *Clash*, p. 247.

⁸⁶ *The Plebeian's Progress*, pp. 96–97.

⁸⁷ *The Plebeian's Progress*, p. 107.

much more concerned with birth control, and more revealing from the point of view of gender difference. Ethel is terrified of becoming pregnant, an event which would reduce the Reynolds to even greater poverty, and it is the cause of much conflict when she does become pregnant: 'You and your lies — and me, believing them, that's what I can't get over! [...] Trust you! Well, I did, and this is what I've got — [...] Three months gone, the doctor says.'⁸⁸ After consulting a few self-opinionated neighbours about the matter, Ethel decides that abstaining from sex is the best action to take in the future. Being generally more dominant than her husband Joe Reynolds, this has a strong effect on his psychology: Reynolds of course takes his problems to work with him, as the internal monologue makes quite clear: 'What did she think he was? A cissie?'⁸⁹ He is thinking this in the factory, and it is an impression more than reinforced when one of the (male) factory workers, on seeing Reynolds's initially abysmal attempts to display his strength by bending a six-inch nail with his bare hands, adopts a simpering voice and says 'Oh, I say, [...] aren't you strong! [...] I could fall for you in a big way', and when Allen immediately tells him to shut up, the unnamed man grins and says 'I adore bullies [...] I do wish I was your wife!'.⁹⁰ Playful male banter this may be, but it is also making a comment on Reynolds's perceived emasculation, and Reynolds is very soon ready to leave his wife because he does not consider his marriage to be any longer valid. In George Garrett's short story 'Firstborn', Harry too initially has an uncooperative wife who is equally frightened of pregnancy; he roars 'Bed! What use is a bed to me?' to her. He is nicknamed 'Playfair' by his work

⁸⁸ *She Was There Too*, p. 49.

⁸⁹ *She Was There Too*, p. 212.

⁹⁰ *She Was There Too*, p. 213.

colleagues because of his habit of repeating his sexual entreaties out loud to himself when at work.⁹¹

There is a reference to the lack of access to birth control information in *Hunger and Love*, although it is more concerned with sex outside of marriage, and is unsurprisingly incorporated into the narrator's conspiracy theory. Walking down Guilford Street one evening, Phelps notices the Foundling Hospital: 'That is for the love children. [...] The bourgeoisie [...] built the stone walls and took [them] in. Do for cannon fodder' (p. 412). But the issue appears to be more complex than this, as Phelps begins to understand when he continues his walk and reaches a urinal in Gray's Inn Road: 'STICK NO BILLS. They have their decencies — or is it merely — birth-control? Rubber goods would perhaps limit syphilis; is *that* perhaps why?' (p. 413). The reasoning behind this is not entirely clear, but the initial suggestion could be that Phelps believes that the Establishment is discouraging contraception in order to control births through death by syphilis. It is perhaps more coherent, though, that Phelps thinks that the Establishment needs to preserve the status quo by encouraging an ideology which upholds the importance of the family, an institution it considers necessary for social and political stability; sex outside of marriage is a threat to the containment of that stability, so Phelps wonders if, instead of encouraging pre- or extra-marital sexual activity by advertising contraceptives, the fear of sexually transmitted diseases is a deterrent, and thus a better way to maintain the social order.

Sex and books are difficult to balance for many male characters in the working-class fiction of the inter-war period, and the question of gender is also significant in this area. Women were newly emancipated in some respects, and writers too felt somewhat liberated from the old taboos regarding the mention of sexual matters. Rhys Davies claims that D. H. Lawrence told him: 'All you young writers have *me* to thank for what freedom you enjoy,

⁹¹ George Garrett, 'Firstborn', *Adelphi*, 8 (1934), pp. 180–87; repr. in *The Collected George Garrett*, ed. by Michael Murphy (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 1999), pp. 32–40 (p. 35).

[...] for being able to say much that you couldn't even hint at before I appeared. It was *I* who set about smashing down the barriers.'⁹² Lawrence is in the background of many working-class novels as a kind of literary godfather. Set just a few miles from Lawrence's native Eastwood, Walter Brierley's *Sandwichman* is self-consciously inspired by his work, and the protagonist Arthur Gardner, like Phelps, has overwhelming thoughts of sex which interfere with his reading. Gardner works as a miner and he is also studying two days a week at Trentingham University College, which is modelled on Nottingham University College where both Brierley and Lawrence studied. Following an intense sexual encounter with his girlfriend, '[a]t Trentingham the next Monday, [Gardner] felt the interference and was astounded.'⁹³ The narrator, voicing his thoughts, says of Gardner's girlfriend, 'Nancy was like some of the women in [Lawrence's] books [...] sex-driven out of all balance. [...] It would have to stop.'⁹⁴ It is one of the many examples of forthright females and timid males that are present in working-class literature, and this instance leads to the general emasculation of Gardner: he can only cope with the problem by accepting that a sex life is completely incompatible with his studies, and so he forgoes further sexual activities in favour of reading for his college work.

Reading is vital to many many working-class protagonists, although Gardner's stepfather is an additional problem: enraged by his stepson's attempts to educate himself, he asks, 'Does 'e think the damned 'ouse is made for 'im and 'is studying?', and frequently interrupts Gardner's reading to force him to work in the garden.'⁹⁵ (A similar experience to this is a factual one Jonathan Rose writes about in relation to the difficulties many young (male) readers experienced with their uncomprehending parents: Vernon Scannell's father

⁹² *Print of a Hare's Foot*, p. 138.

⁹³ *Sandwichman*, p. 42.

⁹⁴ *Sandwichman*, pp. 48–49.

⁹⁵ *Sandwichman*, pp. 78–79.

saw reading as effeminate — a belief which was by no means uncommon — and often told his sons to put down their books and go out and chop down some trees. But as there were no trees in the neighbourhood and the family did not have the necessary tools, Scannell understood this to be ‘some kind of metaphor’.⁹⁶) Gardner’s studies also interfere with his work in the mine, where he recites ‘poems and chunks from Shakespeare and Chaucer’.⁹⁷ He is ‘getting a mind’ as Phelps calls it, and which the narrator describes as ‘hungry for learning’; he feels that his work is ‘an obstruction to his real self’ and that ‘He must get free, must get to a satisfying level of all books and continuous teaching.’⁹⁸ The analogy between these words and Phelps’s furiously striving towards ‘the human’ is evident. And Gardner’s intellectual hunger leads to his dismissal from the mine: like Phelps, he is caught reading a book, and as a result of causing an accident in an inattentive moment, he is considered too much of a liability to work in the mine. Gardner joins the many working-class fictional characters in the ‘dole’ queue.

Joe Rourke also improves himself by reading, although his main impediments to ‘getting a mind’ are his parents in particular. Rourke’s father Mick is perhaps as much against the ‘filth’ that he reads — such as Zola and Joyce — as against anything that is likely to give his son independent thoughts; Rourke is reduced to hiding books in his room to prevent his parents from burning them. It is bliss for him to be on his own, when he can read in peace and educate himself: ‘At last! To be alone! Alone! He flung down the paper. From his pocket he took a book. It was a pamphlet by Paine. He read on, little thinking of the time.’⁹⁹ The above quotation reads very much like something that Phelps would have said,

⁹⁶ Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, CT: Nota Bene, 2001; repr. 2002), p. 179.

⁹⁷ *Sandwichman*, p. 20.

⁹⁸ *Sandwichman*, pp. 72, 49.

⁹⁹ *Drift*, p. 27–28.

and much like Phelps's bosses, Rourke's father disapproves of intellectual pursuits: when his son is forced to deny that he has been 'reading one of those dirty books', he says, 'I was not reading at all, [...] I was just thinking — that's all', to which his father retorts, 'That's as bad as reading'.¹⁰⁰ His father is having difficulties with his own thoughts, but one of them involves a conspiracy theory which puts reading at the root of his son's problems: 'Ever since he got in with that friend of his, who's been lending him books, well — I don't know what's come over him, I don't indeed,' and he tells his wife Martha that he will kill Rourke for not following 'his beautiful religion'.¹⁰¹

Allen too is a 'gluttonous reader' who 'haunt[s] the local public library and grub[s] in a world of theories and ideas'; but this causes him to feel uncomfortable with his lowly position in life: 'More and more he chafed at the commonplace demands of his own existence'.¹⁰² There is often a psychological clash when working-class ideology confronts middle class ideology, the latter of which frequently exudes an air of daunting solemnity, such as the occasion when Allen says his marriage vows at the register office. He feels as though he were guilty of an unnamed crime. The situation is almost Kafkaesque:

He was held by the man's keen grey eyes: mesmeric. Felt suddenly guilty. The whole atmosphere reeked of legal affairs. Important. To what weighty things was he making testimony? Already he had probably said too much — he half expected to be suddenly accused of something — the tall man to shut his book with a bang, leap for the door, and turn the key in the lock.¹⁰³

Of note here are the two short, laconic sentences, 'Felt suddenly guilty', and 'Important', both of which eliminate the subject, and the second of which very briefly summarizes the sense of the occasion, in so doing investing the word with a distinct

¹⁰⁰ *Drift*, p. 52–53.

¹⁰¹ *Drift*, p. 126.

¹⁰² *The Plebeian's Progress*, p. 30.

¹⁰³ *The Plebeian's Progress*, p. 91.

atmosphere of menace. It is an alien, bourgeois moment that Phelps would fully recognize, and even the structure of the sentence 'To what weighty things was he making testimony?' underlines the solemnity of the middle-class discourse infiltrating Allen's mind. This is how the bourgeois world, with its different rituals, its ceremonies, and its frightening vocabulary, perpetuates itself and all the institutions it supports. One of Allen's reactions is to try to ignore it, although Phelps frequently resists it with a strong mental rejection.

But in *Means Test Man* the middle-class world is seen as a way to escape from the poverty of unemployment, and Jane Cook forbids her husband to speak in dialect to their son John because 'at home, at least, he must know that there was another language', and that without using it 'there would be small chance of his escaping from the poverty and dullness which even now he was beginning to see limited him.'¹⁰⁴ Jane sees entrance into the middle class as an escape, but if the narrator of *Hunger and Love* says at times that Phelps has desires to be middle class, or if it is suggested that he thinks this, it is only irony: the novel is a very strong criticism of the bourgeoisie, and it is clear that ultimately a classless society is sought.

Jane's anger with her family's financial situation is not quite focalized politically, although a few sentences reveal her thoughts to be approaching political criticism:

She had read the report of the new Unemployment Bill going through Parliament, then she had turned over the sheet and seen a picture of a cabinet minister on the beach at Brighton. [...] A suggestion of wildness had swept her and behind her hate and anger was a strong activity reaching out towards something definite.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ *Means Test Man*, p. 22.

¹⁰⁵ *Means Test Man*, p. 102.

The 'something definite' is never reached, and Jane simply blames 'the system', her hatred being sometimes directed at her husband, sometimes at herself. Phelps and Allen, on the other hand, have similar strong socialist ideas and try to influence others with them; but, also like Phelps, Allen realizes that the task is colossal, and there is an echo of Phelps's irony in his thoughts: 'They knew what they were talking about; didn't they read the newspapers?'. The narrator continues, 'Allen tried to protest what a farce it was to expect anything even faintly resembling a reasonable exposition of Socialism to appear in a newspaper.'¹⁰⁶ The propaganda machine rules, and the people Allen argues with believe that people are naturally competitive, naturally selfish. Allen, on the other hand, believes, as does Phelps, that 'human interest' — perhaps almost identical to Britton's idea of 'the human' — involves co-operation, and that bourgeois civilisation is retrogressive.

And just as *Hunger and Love* contains a number of presumably autobiographical observations about how employers devise new schemes to save money — such as Sarner paying Phelps a little more so he can eat elsewhere at lunchtime instead of consuming the business's gas by eating his food in the bookshop basement — *The Plebeian's Progress* has similar anecdotes. Allen works at Bratwell & Gordon's, where he learns about the penny-pinching activities of various clients of theirs. At one firm, for instance, the ten-minute tea break is moved to the afternoon, in so doing taking ten minutes per week from every employee because they do not work on Saturday afternoons; by opening the office thirty minutes earlier and closing it thirty minutes earlier, electricity is saved during the winter months; and by including an element of cleaning duty in new employees' job descriptions, the boss saves money by making two cleaners redundant. This is a very similar world to that of Phelps's 'profit-sneaks' (p. 229). Working as he does for a firm of

¹⁰⁶ *The Plebeian's Progress*, p. 37.

accountants, Allen discovers a great deal about how various businesses are run, which is in reality an effective way for the narrator to criticize corrupt business practices, such as tax evasion by filling in falsified forms: again, this appears to be reminiscent of Sarner's secret activities behind his locked door. Politically, then, Allen's ideas are very similar to Phelps's, such as when he says: 'Only the State should have the power of investing money and employing men. Not until then will employment be employment and not exploitation' and he sees the negative side of having money: 'Money is poisonous in two ways — it poisons those who have it and it poisons those who haven't.'¹⁰⁷ Ultimately, as with the narrator of *Hunger and Love*, Allen sees the whole financial system as corrupt:

Marvellous how we all stuck it — knowing, as almost everybody of any intelligence at all did know, that the whole trouble was the way industry was tied to this vicious, obsolete financial system which converted the work of the world to the enrichment of the few and the poverty of the many. However much we disagree on remedies, we nearly all agree on the cause.¹⁰⁸

There are no direct attacks against politics in *Drift*, although Rourke has socialist friends whom he has met at the Labour club; rather, the attacks are focused on religion, and Catholicism in particular. Rourke is very much a loner like Phelps, and as Fordham says of his writing in general, 'the shared struggles of early youth, membership of gangs, a sense of belonging [...] is triumphally repudiated in Hanley'.¹⁰⁹ Right from the beginning of the book, throughout which Joe expresses doubts because of the ideas implanted by his pious parents, there exist the desires to excoriate religion, as in: 'He wanted there and then to shout aloud — 'I do not believe — I do not believe.'¹¹⁰ Rourke believes that Catholicism is

¹⁰⁷ *The Plebeian's Progress*, p. 138.

¹⁰⁸ *The Plebeian's Progress*, p. 142.

¹⁰⁹ John Fordham, *James Hanley: Modernism and the Working Class* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 2002), p. 34.

¹¹⁰ *Drift*, p. 21.

at the root of the problems: 'He did not want to remain a Catholic, because it was no more than a scheme to keep poor people and rich people apart.'¹¹¹ The narrator of *Hunger and Love* also attacks religion, although the targets are much broader and he believes that all institutions as part of a vast conspiracy:

But the ordinary shopboy gets robbed of all excuse for wanting to live, long before he starts work at all. In the school. Education Act, 1870. In the home. Englishman's home is castle, family foundation of State; authority, parent foundation authority Government employer. Do this, he doeth it. Why? (p. 78).

The expression 'Englishman's home is castle' is evidently another ironic use of platitudinous language. And the word 'doeth' is obviously intended as an example of biblical language, religion of course being one of Phelps's pet hates. But perhaps more revealing for the narrator is the archaic nature of the word itself, the fact that 'Do this, he doeth it' is an automatic response: it is similar to the father's automatic touching of his cap to figures of authority or saying 'sir' to his general practitioner mentioned in one of Britton's unpublished plays, 'O. H. M. S.; or, How to Make God'.¹¹² They are social atavisms which he is pleased to note that his son will never have to use: 'They made me do it all my life, but it's something if I best 'em with my own blood'.¹¹³

Institutions, whether Althusser's 'State Repressive Apparatuses' or 'Ideological State Apparatuses', enslave the subject, but the response to Phelps's response is to question the situation which allows it: 'Why?'.

In Chapter 1, I dealt with the question of critics' reception of *Hunger and Love* as a working-class novel, but have said nothing of the reception of Britton's work by working-

¹¹¹ *Drift*, p. 127.

¹¹² Lionel Britton, 'O. H. M. S.; or, How to Make God', unpublished typescript, [n. d.], p. 15, LBC, Series II: Drafts, Box 10, Folder 9.

¹¹³ 'O. H. M. S.'.

class writers. Of the eighteen novelists listed by Haywood, only comments about Britton by two of the authors appear to have survived. Simon Blumenfeld's protagonist Alec in *Jew Boy* (1935) is very disparaging towards Britton (and the recent plays of Bernard Shaw), and pretends to believe that Shaw is dead and that Britton is now writing under his name: 'If you take the trouble to compare [Shaw's *On the Rocks* (1933) and *Too True to Be Good* (1932)] with Lionel Britton's *Brain* and *Spacetime Inn*, you're bound to see that they're written, all four, by the same verbose, muddled, amateur sociologist'.¹¹⁴

The other one of the eighteen had met Britton, and his reaction to him could hardly be more different (or more eulogistic). Frank Tilsley was well-acquainted with Britton's ideas: Britton was once 'good enough to cart me around London and listen talk' (*sic*), as Tilsley phrased it in an undated letter to Britton.¹¹⁵ Tilsley claimed to have read *Hunger and Love* three times, along with 'a few other books, biological etc., rising out of it', and rather naively asks Britton where he can obtain his plays without buying them; he calls Britton 'a cross between a 20th century Darwin and Marx, although, of course, more important than both together'. Tilsley's suicide in 1957 was reported in the *Times*, and the obituary is perhaps something like Britton would have wished for his own: it spoke of Tilsley's 'lively fidelity with which the author caught the everyday life of ordinary men and women'.¹¹⁶

I have examined several features of working-class literature in the present chapter, particularly in relation to Lionel Britton, and what is quite evident in these writings is the need to tell stories about working-class life with as much authenticity as possible, and to depict it in opposition to the middle-class stories that were previously available to the reading public, to an increasingly highly literate working class. What is obvious is that the

¹¹⁴ Simon Blumenfeld, *Jew Boy* (Cape: London, 1935; repr. Lawrence & Wishart, 1986), p. 245.

¹¹⁵ Frank Tilsley, letter to Lionel Britton, [1930s], LBC, Box 2, Folder 28.

¹¹⁶ Anonymous, 'Frank Tilsley', *Times*, March 18, 1957, p. 10.

cataloguing, the description of work, the lack of money and effect on the individual and the family are crucial in this literature. The association of this writing with realism or naturalism, the attempt to represent a situation as it actually 'is', is clear. Most comments on and analyses of working-class literature are rooted in presuppositions of realism. Croft links extreme realism to autobiography. In the Introduction to his thesis, he says: 'The novel was a relatively accessible form for the putative working-class writers to adopt, since it permitted an autobiographical structure and a naturalist style.'¹¹⁷ David Bell agrees with this when he says that 'The traditions of working-class writing were essentially autobiographical. Because of this tradition few working-class *Bildungsromane* were entirely fictional.'¹¹⁸ Although both comments ignore the strong autobiographical content also prominent in middle-class writers of the time, there is certainly a rich element of autobiography in working-class writing. Taking Haywood's list of internal working-class writers in the 1930s as an example, it is significant that at least half of them wrote autobiographies or part-autobiographies: B. L. Coombes (mentioned above), Willie Goldman, Walter Greenwood, Leslie Halward, James Hanley, Harold Heslop (also mentioned above), Jack Hilton, Jim Phelan and Frank Tilsley.¹¹⁹

John Fordham argues that Hanley's working-class fiction takes Zola's 'bourgeois dissidence', with its emphasis on the sordid and the violent, and arrives at a position in which the traditional boundaries between the autobiographical and the fictional become

¹¹⁷ 'The Socialist Novel in the 1930s', p. 3.

¹¹⁸ David Bell, *Ardent Propaganda: Miners' Novels and Class Conflict 1927-1939*, Umeå Studies in the Humanities, 125 (Umeå: Umeå University, 1995), p. 117 n. 11.

¹¹⁹ Willie Goldman, *East End my Cradle: Portrait of an Environment* (London: Faber and Faber, 1940; repr. Robson, 1988); Walter Greenwood, *There Was a Time* (London: Cape, 1967); Leslie Halward, *Let Me Tell You* (London: Joseph, 1938); James Hanley, *Broken Water: An Autobiographical Excursion* (Chatto & Windus, 1937); Jack Hilton, *Caliban Shrieks* (London: Cobden-Sanderson, 1935); Jim Phelan, *The Name's Phelan: The First Part of the Autobiography of Jim Phelan* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1948; repr. Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1993); Frank Tilsley, *We Live and Learn* (London: Labour Book Service, [1939]).

less distinct. Furthermore, he holds that ‘of greater importance is that realist accounts of working-class experience are creating a political opposition to a dominant bourgeois culture which inevitably represents “‘the great and important’ as the privileged auto/biographical subject”’.¹²⁰

Almost all of the working-class writers of the 1930s wrote novels that were strongly autobiographical, and at least half of them wrote representations of some stage or stages of their lives. Essentially, this was oppositional writing, against the grain of the dominant culture. Lionel Britton, born into a middle-class family, was originally part of that dominant culture. He was a solicitor’s son with a wealthy family on his mother’s side, although various circumstances reduced him to earning a meagre living first as a grocer’s assistant when he was about twelve, and then as an assistant in a bookshop. Because he did this for so many years, it would be difficult to withhold the label ‘working class’ from him, and it could be argued, as Alan Sillitoe says of Robert Tressell, that Britton was ‘grafted on to working-class life through family misfortune’.¹²¹

Writing of class and autobiography, Julia Swindells, a researcher with a strong interest in marginalized groups in society, draws special attention to such groups:

Autobiography now has the potential to be the text of the oppressed and the culturally displaced, forging a right to speak both for and beyond the individual. People in a position of powerlessness — women, black people, working-class people — have more than begun to insert themselves into the culture via autobiography, via the assertion of a ‘personal’ voice, which speaks beyond itself.¹²²

The strongly autobiographical *Hunger and Love* can certainly be seen as a ‘text of the oppressed’, but at the same time it is a working-class novel like no other. A number of stock preoccupations, such as money, poverty, and an intense criticism of the status

¹²⁰ James Hanley, p. 29.

¹²¹ *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, p. 8.

¹²² Julia Swindells, *The Uses of Autobiography* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1995), p. 7.

quo are present, but it is also a novel which shows great contempt for novelistic conventions. Perhaps half of the book is taken up with the ideas of the narrator, often shown as digressions, such as the incident in which a customer enters the book shop and the narrator says to Phelps: 'You look round the shop, and wipe him out of existence' (p. 233). There then follows a long series of thoughts on evolution, social cohesion and the vision of a classless society. The customer is forgotten because he is unimportant: the narrator has only used him as a catalyst with which to release a train of thoughts. The narrator's ideas on this issue are evident, for instance, when Phelps and his friend Montague are considering writing a novel and they chance upon an acquaintance who has written one, and who seems to have the same ideas as Britton about literature:

'Plots? my lordie! If you wait till you get a plot, you'll never write at all. Life doesn't consist of incidents — not human life; thinking's the biggest part of life since we grew to be human. Ideas are the formative force of civilisation. You're alive: just tell yourself how it feels; everyone'll be interested to know' (p. 430).

The message is clear: the events which make up the conventional fabric of novels, the realistic elements, for instance, of the working-class novel, are in the end not realistic at all. And it is this which makes the message a very modernist one.

CHAPTER 4

Outsider Modernism

In this chapter I shall begin by briefly outlining what are generally considered to be the major features of literary modernism. I shall then attempt to give approximate dates to the phenomenon and to give some of the many contributory factors leading up to it.

My aim is to relate the characteristics of 'mainstream' modernism to the use by internal working-class writers of what I term 'outsider modernism', an expression I define later. In so doing, I am linking two modes of writing which are frequently seen as antithetical: as working-class literature is conventionally associated with realism, modernism is often considered to be elitist or bourgeois, and I investigate these claims. Most of this chapter, though, is an examination of several examples of outsider modernism in working-class novels of the inter-war years, concluding with Britton's *Hunger and Love*.

What are generally understood as the key features of literary modernism are briefly but effectively described in an essay by David Lodge in Bradbury and McFarlane's *Modernism 1890–1930* (1976).¹ Here, Lodge mentions the formal 'experimental or innovatory' nature of modernist literature, its concern with consciousness and certain psychological states, leading to a reduction of perceived objectivity in narrative, and a consequent breakdown of the conventional structure of the novel, perhaps with no beginning or closure, and perhaps without chronological sequence. Clearly, there is a conscious movement towards the self, into individual psychology, and a corresponding movement away from the representation of a common external reality. Self-referentiality is a common feature of modernism and I later show it as particularly prominent in Britton's work. Essentially, modernism is a

¹ David Lodge, 'The Language of Modernist Fiction', in *Modernism 1890–1930*, ed. by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1976; repr. London: Penguin, 1991) pp. 481–96 (p. 481).

different kind of realism which attempts to represent a psychological as opposed to a physical reality. This is often expressed as a stream of consciousness with its attempt to construct a series of random thoughts and sensations, or as an interior monologue, an attempt to reconstruct a person's direct thoughts. Language may also be fragmented, with multiple voices often used without conventional grammatical indicators that there is more than one voice. Ideologically, modernism can be seen as an attack on conventional nineteenth-century realist narrative, and by extension as an attack on many aspects of nineteenth-century life: as society loses its apparent cohesion, things fall apart.

The origins of modernism are more difficult to ascertain. It seems *de rigueur*, though, to quote Virginia Woolf's essay 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown' (1924), in which she criticizes Arnold Bennett's work in particular and claims that 'in or about December, 1910, human character changed' although other critics point to D. H. Lawrence's wartime 1915 — when 'the old world ended' — as a better guideline, at least for the beginnings of 'high' modernism.² But although the key works of high modernism in English — such as Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), and Woolf's *The Waves* (1931) — were written within a relatively short space of one other after the war, there is a longer period of (pre-)modernist writing dating back to the nineteenth century. Raymond Williams, for instance, states quite bluntly that writers such as Dickens made possible the work of Joyce.³ In *Modernist Fiction* (1998), Randall Stevenson names Henry James and Joseph Conrad in particular as 'transitional' authors in what Malcolm Bradbury calls '[t]he "shake-up", the change in consciousness' which characterized modernism, and which Bradbury estimates was from about 1880 to about 1930, dates with which most critics

² Virginia Woolf, *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* (London: L. and V. Woolf, 1924; repr. in *Collected Essays*, 4 vols, Hogarth, 1966), 1, 320; D. H. Lawrence, *Kangaroo* (London: Martin Secker, 1923; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1950), p. 240.

³ Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformism* (London: Verso, 1989; repr. 1996), p. 32.

would probably more or less agree.⁴ By the early 1930s, then, high modernism was disappearing, although its heritage continued. My principal aim in this chapter is to highlight its continuation in the work of several internal working-class writers, with particular reference of course to Lionel Britton's *Hunger and Love*.

The intellectual, social and historical background leading up to modernism is complex and varied. Bradbury lists some of the thinkers who had an important influence: 'Significantly the change coincides with the emergence of William James and Bergson in philosophy, Freud and Jung in psychology, and Pareto and Durkheim in sociology, as influential forces in thought.'⁵ Einstein too played a major part, and Darwin and Marx were no less influential, although their important works were written a little earlier. And it is evident that the push towards sexual equality is an essential element to add to the list of contributory factors to the modernist phenomenon. Bradbury also gives the growth of population — and the attendant urbanization of the country — along with industrialization, massification and democratization, as all assisting in the shake-up. It would also be difficult not to consider World War I, as Lawrence had done, as a major transitional phase because it perhaps represents the sudden and in many respects definitive death of the continuing Victorian ethos at the same time as it also in many ways signals the beginning of a new epoch.

Modernism is often associated with the deracinated individual, the outsider or the exile, a figure I deal with in the next chapter, and it is certainly not a coincidence that most of the central writers of modernist literature have their origins in another country or did not settle permanently in one place. Joyce was born in Ireland and at the end of *Ulysses* the words

⁴ Randall Stevenson, *Modernist Fiction* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992; rev. ed. Prentice Hall, 1998), p. 21; Malcolm Bradbury, *The Social Context of Modern English Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), pp. xxiii, xxxi.

⁵ *The Social Context of Modern English Literature*, p. xxx, n. 1.

‘Trieste–Zürich–Paris’ (representing the three places where he wrote the book) could easily symbolize the dynamic nature of the modernist narrative; Eliot and James were North Americans living in Britain, Conrad had his origins in Poland, Pound was a North American who lived in several countries, and Lawrence left England to travel restlessly around the world. Interestingly, Aldous Huxley describes Lawrence’s frequent travelling as ‘at once a flight and a search, a search for some society with which he could establish contact, [...] and at the same time a flight from the miseries and evils of the society into which he had been born’.⁶ This quotation could be applied to a great number of writers using modernist techniques, and will later be shown to apply to Britton in particular, although his flight is into his own mind, and his version of Ranim (Lawrence’s ideal society) is in a far distant future, as I shall clarify in Chapter 6. Woolf’s voice, though, like that of other modernist women writers — for instance Gertrude Stein’s, Dorothy Richardson’s or May Sinclair’s — explores the world from a feminist perspective. In a possible allusion to Donne’s ‘On his Mistress Going to Bed’, Winifred Holtby states that:

The women whom Mrs. Woolf knew were exploring the professional world, the political world, the world of business, discovering that they themselves had legs as well as wombs, brains as well as nerves, reason as well as sensibility; their Americas lay within themselves, and altered the map as profoundly as any added by Cabot or Columbus.⁷

Holtby’s emphasis on psychology also evokes comparisons with *Hunger and Love*, particularly the ‘Columbus of the Mind’ pages (pp. 22–38).

Perhaps one of the strongest critics of modernism at the time was Frank Swinnerton, a writer and critic Peter Keating considers to have been ‘actively committed to [...] realistic

⁶ *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. by Aldous Huxley (London: Heinemann, 1932; rep. 1934), p. xxvi.

⁷ Winifred Holtby, *Virginia Woolf* (London: Wishart, 1932), p. 91.

fiction', and who in *A London Bookman* (1928) claims that Woolf 'lives in a very restricted circle of opinion and the whole content of her mind is in reality aesthetic. She is suffering from the applause of a little circle', and this circle in turn 'suffers from intellectual inbreeding, so [...] has no relation whatever to the normal life of the community'.⁸ Jacques Mercanton remembers Joyce speaking of other critics of modernism: 'It seems that [...] some of those in the Auden–Spender circle [...] had accused him of writing hermetic works "for the rich." As though he didn't write for everyone.'⁹ Cyril Connolly (although certainly not Stephen Spender) would probably have agreed with the criticism: in the February 1940 issue of *Horizon*, Connolly called Joyce, Proust and Woolf 'Ivory Tower Dwellers'.¹⁰ And the years do not appear to have reduced charges that modernism is elitist. John Carey makes out a case for modernism as a plot to keep the barbarians from the gates of knowledge; he states: 'The early twentieth century saw a determined effort, on the part of the European intelligentsia, to exclude the masses from culture. In England this movement has become known as modernism.'¹¹ And Jonathan Rose backs up his general argument of modernism as an elitist plot:

in the twentieth [century], autodidacts discovered that the cultural goalposts had been moved, that a new canon of deliberately difficult literature had been called into existence. The inaccessibility of

⁸ Peter Keating, *The Haunted Study: A Social History of the English Novel 1875–1914* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1989), p. 288; Frank Swinnerton, *A London Bookman* (London: Secker, 1928; repr. 1930), pp. 112, 116.

⁹ Jacques Mercanton, 'The Hours of James Joyce', trans. by Lloyd C. Parks, in *Portraits of the Artist in Exile: Recollections of James Joyce by Europeans*, ed. by Willard Potts (Portmarnock: Wolfhound Press, 1979), pp. 206–52 (p. 234).

¹⁰ David Leeming, *Stephen Spender: A Life in Modernism* (New York: Henry Holt, 1999), p. 136.

¹¹ John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880–1939* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), pp. 16–17.

modernism in effect rendered the common reader illiterate once again, and preserved a body of culture as the exclusive property of a coterie.¹²

Carey also emphasizes the right wing nature of several modernist writers' interests: for instance, Yeats and eugenics, Pound and Mussolini, and entitles a chapter 'Wyndham Lewis and Hitler'.¹³

Other critics, however, have refuted arguments regarding modernists' anti-democratic agenda. Although T. S. Eliot is noted for stating that 'poets in our civilisation, as it exists at present, must be *difficult*', Jewel Spears Brooker goes to some lengths to deny that T. S. Eliot is elitist, and claims that his use of the word 'common' has no derogatory meaning; she also emphasizes his love of Dante, 'the most *universal* of poets'.¹⁴ She might have continued by mentioning Eliot's role in the publication of former miner Idris Davies's poems by Faber, but the argument would still be a little thin. More convincing as an indication that Eliot's elitism is far from unproblematic is Danny Abse's recollection of a meeting at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in the early 1950s, where Eliot was present and the Jewish working-class anarchist Emanuel Litvinoff read his own poem, 'To T. S. Eliot'; this was a rather fierce anti-elitist attack on Eliot from the viewpoint of an outsider and caused some alarm, but Abse, sitting behind Eliot, heard him mutter 'it was a very good poem.'¹⁵ Equally convincingly, Robert Alter makes a strong argument for *Ulysses* being not only comprehensible to the 'common reader', but also enjoyable.¹⁶ And another strong argument, this time against Virginia Woolf as an elitist, is made by Melba Cuddy-

¹² *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, p. 394.

¹³ *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, pp. 182–208.

¹⁴ T. S. Eliot, 'The Metaphysical Poets', in *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1932; repr. 1951), pp. 281–91 (p. 289); Jewel Spears Brooker, *Mastery and Escape: T. S. Eliot and the Dialectics of Modernism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), pp. 65–66.

¹⁵ Valentine Cunningham, 'Litvinoff's Room: East End Anarchism', in *To Hell with Culture*, pp. 141–61.

¹⁶ Robert Alter, 'Joyce's *Ulysses* and the Common Reader', *Modernism/Modernity* 5:3 (1998), 19–31.

Keane, whose central premise is that Woolf is a democratic intellectual.¹⁷ She quotes Woolf as wanting ‘a system that [does] not shut out’; to support this, Cuddy–Keane talks about the direct actions that Woolf performed for female suffrage, and of her work with the Women’s Co-operative Guild, although her main concern is to illustrate Woolf’s democratic principles as a writer, revealingly saying that this centred on ‘the social dynamics of a literate community and, in particular, on the empowerment of marginalized, repressed, or absent voices’.¹⁸ If the modernists represented an interior reality, it seems very odd to imagine how modernism can be considered to render the working class illiterate; everyone has access to this reality, and there is no reason why the working class should find this less comprehensible than any representations of ‘external reality’. As Cuddy–Keane also observes of Woolf :

Having broadened the category of lowbrows to include both duchess and prostitute, Woolf then resituates the duchess and destabilizes *any* relation between brow and social position: ‘I myself have known duchesses who were highbrows,’ she continues, ‘also charwomen’ [...]. Interests are one thing; economics, another. We are warned not to confuse them.¹⁹

This is a very strong argument, and of particular interest in that the above words in quotation marks come from a supposed exemplar of elitism: it is evident that Woolf would in no way see, say, such an expression as ‘intellectual manual worker’ as an oxymoron: intellectuality knows no class or sex barriers.

Along with Woolf, Gilbert and Gubar too are concerned with women as a political minority, colonized by patriarchy and shut out from society. The titles of their volumes of the trilogy *No Man’s Land* — *The War of the Words*, *Sexchanges* and *Letters from the*

¹⁷ Melba Cuddy–Keane, *Virginia Woolf, the Intellectual, and the Public Sphere* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

¹⁸ *Virginia Woolf, the Intellectual and the Public Sphere*, pp. 33, 39.

¹⁹ *Virginia Woolf, the Intellectual, and the Public Sphere*, p. 25.

Front — indicate the oppositional nature of their subject: this is women on the warpath. Gilbert and Gubar say that ‘as much as the industrial revolution and the fall of God, the rise of the female imagination was a central problem for the twentieth-century male imagination’.²⁰ The modernism that they write about seems to be a long way from elitism. Frequently, women writers employ modernist techniques as expressions of their frustration. For the outsider Jean Rhys and her female protagonists, for example, modernist techniques are a language to be used against the oppressor. And although the oppressor is of course male, he is also from another class, just as Phelps’s oppressors are.

The antagonism between the sexes in their fight towards equality is in many respects mirrored in the struggle of the working class against the government and against their employers. In the modernist period, both women and working class groups were oppressed political minorities striving to make their voices heard in a changing world from which they had hitherto been excluded, but into which they were now seeking to be included. As I stated in Chapter 3, the internal working-class novel began towards the middle of the nineteenth century, but it was perhaps not really until the 1930s, when mainstream modernism was beginning to decline, that working-class fiction, then by no means uncommon as a sub-genre, developed a more insistent voice. A limited but nonetheless significant number of working-class writers, among whom I certainly include Lionel Britton, were to adopt different aesthetic strategies. Mainstream modernism was a means of writing against the nineteenth-century realist grain: a new subject had to be expressed in new ways, instead of automatically following the well-trodden narrative path, although many did not hear the new voices of the dispossessed.

It was in the 1930s that a slightly different criticism was made by writers on the left that modernism was bourgeois, and ipso facto unsuited to the class struggle. The roots of this

²⁰ *No Man's Land*, 1: *The War of the Words*, 156.

quarrel began in 1888, when Frederick Engels wrote a significant letter to Margaret Harkness after reading her first novel, *A City Girl* (1887).²¹ In it, Engels is enthusiastic about the book but claims that it is 'not quite realistic enough'; he praises (Honoré de) Balzac and says that he 'go[es] against his own class sympathies and political prejudices'. He claims that Balzac saw 'the real men of the future', and that *La Comédie humaine* (1842–48) is 'one of the greatest triumphs of Realism'. This view of realism as the quintessential way to write about 'real' people in 'real' situations persisted into the heady Marxist days of the 1930s, with modernism seen as the *bête noire* of working-class literature. At the Soviet Writers' Congress of 1934, Karl Radek — who of course had a political agenda rather than a literary one — maintains the praise for Balzac, and uses the word 'bourgeois' in relation to modernism three times in one sentence; he states that after Proust:

The other hero of contemporary bourgeois literature, though he is not widely known even to bourgeois readers, is James Joyce, the mysterious author of *Ulysses* — a book which the bourgeois literary world, while reading it but little, has made the object of loud discussion.²²

Such attacks by the left were quite common. In an obvious criticism of modernism in *Left Review* by its publishers, the British section of the Writers' International, it is stated that:

The decadence of the past twenty years of English literature and the theatre cannot be understood apart from all that separates 1913 and 1934. It is the collapse of culture, accompanying the collapse of an economic system.²³

²¹ Frederick Engels, Afterword, *A Manchester Shirtmaker: A Realistic Story of To-day* by Margaret Harkness (London: Authors' Co-operative Publishing (as 'John Law'), [1890]; repr. Brighouse: Northern Herald Books, (as 'John Law (Margaret Harkness)'), 2002), pp. 83–85.

²² Maxim Gorky and others, *Problems of Soviet Literature: Reports and Speeches at the First Soviet Writers' Congress*, ed. and trans. by H. G. Scott (London: Lawrence, [1935]; repr. as *Soviet Writers' Congress 1934: The Debate on Socialist Realism and Modernism in the Soviet Union*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1977), p. 152.

²³ *Left Review*, 'Writers' International (British Section)', December 1934, p. 75.

In a later issue of the magazine, Lewis Grassie Gibbon — a working-class writer by no means averse to using modernist techniques in his books — politely but bluntly dismissed this as ‘bolshevik blah’.²⁴ David Margolies’s collection of articles from *Left Review* reveals a far from doctrinaire approach to leftist propaganda, with modernism certainly not automatically assumed as having the negative role that Radek had given it; Margolies highlights the *Review*’s doctrinal flexibility in his Introduction, and included in the collection is Day Lewis’s praise for *The Waste Land*: ‘a very good poem and of value to the revolutionary’, as well as Spender’s generally favourable reviews of the work of D. H. Lawrence and Joyce.²⁵

The Marxist literary critic Georg Lukács, generally considered as one of modernism’s principal opponents, also put forward nineteenth-century bourgeois realism in the novel as the literary model for writers in general to aspire to. But despite his criticism, Lukács did not slavishly toe the Soviet line vis-à-vis ‘socialist realism’. And no matter what Engels’s views may have been towards literary realism and his belief that the ‘truth’ would out through it, it seems rather ironic to continue to prescribe a middle-class literary antidote to working-class conditions inflicted by the middle classes themselves. Tony Pinkney suggests that Lukács’s model is in part a ‘rather desperate clutching for some stable literary model’, although Tony Davies believes that Lukács was under considerable pressure from the Stalinists to appear to be maintaining a socialist realist ethos, and calls the 1930s Balzac link an ‘absurdity’.²⁶

²⁴ *Left Review*, ‘Writers’ International (British Section)’, February 1935, p. 179.

²⁵ David Margolies, ed., *Writing the Revolution: Cultural Criticism from Left Review* (London: Pluto Press, 1998), pp. 1–22 (p. 14), p. 53 and pp. 174–77.

²⁶ Tony Pinkney, ‘Raymond Williams and the “Two Faces of Modernism”’, in *Raymond Williams: Critical Perspectives*, ed. by Terry Eagleton (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), pp. 12–33 (p. 24); Tony Davies, ‘Unfinished Business: Realism and Working-Class Writing, *The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 125–36 (p. 131).

If realism is generally associated with the nineteenth-century novel, and modernism with a reaction against it, the 1930s could hardly have seen a complete return to the realism of a former century. There was, in fact, an emergence of a different kind of realism, as opposed to Balzacian realism. As Pamela Fox says in *Class Fictions*

In *The Novel and the People* (1937), [Ralph Fox] popularized what was essentially a Lukacsian [sic] position on realism. [...] He critiqued modernism's infatuation with individualism, marginalization, and decentredness (particularly its focus on the 'mad' and the 'sick') but not its potential for depicting the 'fullness' of human experience. *The Novel and the People* thus equally opposed the strain of naturalism popular in proletarian literature, proposing a new realism based in imagination, rather than observation.²⁷

Fox himself says that 'Modern psychology has without doubt accumulated a mass of important material upon human character, in particular upon the deeper, subconscious elements in man, which the novelist must take into account'; and although he is very critical of Proust and Joyce, he says that 'We shall no longer have the old naturalistic realism, no longer have the novel of endless analysis and intuition, but a new realism in which the two find their proper relationship to one another.'²⁸ Obviously, this new realism is a little different from the Stalinist extension of Engels's realism. The new realism could not reject modernism completely, but nor could it allow the novel to be suspended in a nineteenth-century bourgeois realist limbo. The world had changed considerably, and its literature had to move forward to reflect this fact. This meant, at least in part, an acceptance of modernist elements into the structure of the novel.

A revised view of the 1930s realist aesthetic is in evidence today. Valentine Cunningham argues against the conventional perception of the decade as 'a sort of

²⁷ Pamela Fox, *Class Fictions: Shame and Resistance in the British Working-Class Novel, 1890–1945* (Durham, NC.: Duke University Press, 1994), pp. 55–56.

²⁸ Ralph Fox, *The Novel and the People* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1937), p. 103–05.

unfortunate historical blip or bypass on which writing got snagged and slowed down in the good long march of the twentieth century from modernism at the beginning to postmodernism at the end', and says that some instances of James Barke's writing 'simply will not sustain any clean-cut opposition between Realism and modernism, socialists and modernists, Social Realism over against Joyceanism'.²⁹ The Russian revolution had a great effect on a large number of people, although by no means all of its supporters or sympathisers were opposed to modernism. Modernist literary techniques may have deterred some, but along with Barke mentioned above, other working-class authors making use of them — although very infrequently and very sparingly by some of the following — were F. C. Boden, Walter Brierley, Joe Corrie, Lewis Grassie Gibbon, Walter Greenwood, James Hanley, Gwyn Jones, Jack Jones and John Sommerfield. And Lionel Britton, of course. Barke's *Major Operation* (1936), for instance, contains sections obviously inspired by James Joyce, and which Johnny Campbell, leader of the Communist Party of Great Britain, claimed to be 'one of the greatest novels of working-class struggle yet written in any English-speaking country'; and Ethel Mannin was similarly effusive: 'one of the most stimulating pieces of revolutionary writing I ever hope to read, or ever have read'.³⁰ But *Major Operation* is not a thoroughgoing modernist novel: it simply contains strong Joycean elements amongst the realism. Barke uses modernist techniques both to express working-class solidarity and as a kind of socialist/communist hymn in praise of working-class life. This is part of the definition of outsider modernism I give below, and is a literary phenomenon which was to some extent recognized in Tressell by Wim Neetens:

²⁹ Valentine Cunningham, 'The Age of Anxiety and Influence; or, Tradition and the Thirties Talents', in *Rewriting the Thirties: Modernism and After*, ed. by Keith Williams and Steven Matthews (London: Longman, 1997), pp. 5–22 (pp. 5, 14).

³⁰ James Barke, *Major Operation: A Novel* (London: Collins, 1936); H. Gustav Klaus, 'James Barke: A Great-Hearted Writer, a Hater of Oppression, a True Scot', in *A Weapon in the Struggle: The Cultural History of the Communist Party in Britain*, ed. by Andy Croft, (London: Pluto Press, 1998), pp. 7–27 (p. 9).

Both [*The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*'s] form and its career stand witness to the possibility of a democratic modernism which hopefully negates the dictates of the literary market place by being intelligent and experimental without being academic or obscure, popular without being trivial, oppositional without being marginal, instructive without being patronising or dull.³¹

The expression 'democratic modernism' is significant, and is evidently strongly linked to outsider modernism.

Outsider modernism continues to manifest similar preoccupations with individual consciousness as mainstream modernism, although it has a different aesthetic. It is (with perhaps the only exceptions being *Hunger and Love* and John Sommerfield's very experimental *May Day* mentioned above) not the full-blown modernism that exists, for instance, in such works as *Ulysses* (1922) or *The Waves* (1931), where modernist elements are continued throughout the length of the books; it is a hybrid form which manifests itself in the interstices of realism and is normally only occasionally used in a novel; this is probably because the conventions of the day tended to dictate a more 'realistic' approach to literature following what some saw as the excesses of modernism.³² Above all, outsider modernism is concerned with matters of class: political considerations are of primary importance to its aesthetics. In particular, outsider modernism reveals its distinct features at times of heightened emotion in the characters or in the narrator, especially in a psychological or physical crisis. This, of course, is the same function that mainstream modernism serves so frequently, but the emphasis in outsider modernism is on the political component, and naturally in working-class literature this must by definition be socialist of some nature: sometimes outsider modernism is an implicit or explicit cry for working-class solidarity or a celebration of the working-classes themselves, sometimes it is a cry of fear,

³¹ Wim Neetens, *Writing and Democracy: Literature, Politics and Culture in Transition* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p. 154.

³² John Sommerfield, *May Day* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1936; repr. 1986).

contempt, anger, or other emotions directed against the ruling class. And by extension, outsider modernist techniques are also used by other marginal groups which have incorporated them into their literary repertoire, to be used when the occasion demands: not a new toolkit, but a selection of very different and very useful supplementary tools.

By way of a fuller illustration of the above, I now move to the work of several internal working-class authors who have incorporated modernist techniques into their writing, although at the same time I largely avoid works which have already been critically examined specifically for this purpose, such as *A Scots Quair*, *Major Operation* and *May Day*, although I briefly mention the last two because of the light that they shed on some of the authors' earlier works treated here. In particular, I analyse passages from Barke's *The Wild Macraes* (1934) and *The World his Pillow* (1933), Tilsley's *The Plebeian's Progress*, Gwyn Jones's *Times Like These* (1936), Sommerfield's *They Die Young* (1930), F. C. Boden's *Miner* (1932), and James Hanley's 'The Last Voyage' (1920s). Finally, I examine *Hunger and Love* in rather more detail.³³

Cunningham notes of Barke's *Major Operation*: 'This novel gives us classic carnival on the Bakhtinian model; it celebrates the workers, the lower orders, uprisen for the day, powerful, *en masse*, at play.'³⁴ A similar comment could be made about John Sommerfield's most well-known novel *May Day*, and Klaus saw the influence of the cinema on the novel, where 'the camera-eye [is] almost like a searchlight over the city'.³⁵

³³ James Barke, *The World his Pillow* (London: Collins, 1933; repr. Bath: Chivers, [n.d.]); James Barke, *The Wild Macraes* (London: Collins, 1934; repr. Bath: Chivers, [n. d.]); Gwyn Jones, *Times Like These* (London: Gollancz, 1936; repr. 1979); John Sommerfield, *They Die Young* (London: Cape, 1930; repr. as *The Death of Christopher*, New York: Cape and Smith, 1930), p. 291; F. C. Boden, *Miner* (London: Dent, 1932); James Hanley, *The Last Yoyage*, (London: Jackson, 1931; repr. in *Tramps, Workmates and Revolutionaries*), pp. 58–84.

³⁴ *Rewriting the Thirties*, p. 16.

³⁵ *The Literature of Labour*, p. 161.

Although Sommerfield's first novel, *They Die Young*, does not in general concern the working classes, it is nevertheless interesting to compare it with *May Day*. In *They Die Young*, cinematic preoccupations are also very much in evidence. Sommerfield even uses a Hitchcockian device — later to become relatively common and more developed in post-modernist fiction — when the protagonist Christopher meets a man in a café who gives his name as 'John Sommerfield' along with what was presumably Sommerfield's own address in London.³⁶ Although the modernist techniques are less frequent, *They Die Young* shows a less restrained use of them than the later novel. The following passage, with its repetition, its line breaks, its unconventional spacing, and its alternating use of upper and lower case letters, perhaps owes as much to the influence of early examples of what is now known as concrete poetry as it does to cinematic techniques, but it shows that Sommerfield's preoccupations are with the flickers or fluctuations of consciousness: it is attempting to represent psychological reality, or more precisely to conflate Christopher's 'bored and depressed' feelings with the rhythm of the train he is travelling on:

The window framed a series of horrid impressionist pictures, Title — to lower window pull strap towards you — to lower window — to LOWER window

To LoWeR wInDoW pULL sTrAp ToWaRdS yOu

TOWARDS YOU to

lower window...

to lower

WINDOW

pull strap

to lower window pull strap toward [sic] You

To lower WINDOW pull STRAP towards

YOU

³⁶ *They Die Young*, p. 291.

the phrase fled through channels of his mind in agonised obedience to a rhythm: a
 piercing steady rhythm that was woven from bright lengths of steel and the gaps between them.
 He
 groaned.³⁷

The above passage represents the thoughts of Christopher, who lives an existence in which sex and alcohol numb the feelings of meaninglessness. According to Andy Croft, Sommerfield's conversion to communism came '[n]ot long before' the publication of *They Die Young*.³⁸ The earlier novel perhaps shows no trace of communist influence, and stylistically the above techniques belong, Stuart Laing would probably argue, to mainstream modernism's 'many modern chroniclers of the city' who are concerned with 'making the readers share any sense of isolation or disconnection that the characters may feel'.³⁹ By contrast, Laing says that '[*May Day*]'s task is to *reveal* the connections and relations', depicting a 'shared experience' of political activity. Coming as it did in 1930, when mainstream modernism was drawing to a close, it could perhaps be suggested that *They Die Young* forms a bridge between mainstream modernism and outsider modernism. And while *They Die Young* manifests perhaps the most extreme examples of such typographical uses by an outsider modernist author, Sommerfield frequently uses line breaks in the later novel, but his modernist excesses had tempered somewhat by the time he wrote it: for instance, he uses conventional speech marks throughout *May Day*, whereas there are none in *They Die Young*.

James Barke's books are certainly concerned with the 'shared experience' of the working class. Below I show two examples of Barke's outsider modernist techniques from

³⁷ *They Die Young*, pp. 61–62.

³⁸ Andy Croft, Introduction, *May Day*, p. xii.

³⁹ *Class, Culture and Social Change*, p. 149.

two earlier novels, and although they are very different examples, both *The Wild Macraes* and *The World his Pillow* praise the working-classes. The first is an incident in a pub in *The Wild Macraes*, where a very respected member of the working classes appears and has a sudden effect:

Sleep vanished. The night turned day.

Splutter of eggs and bacon coming in momentary lulls of silence. Magnificent odour of boiling fat. Gurgle of golden spirit pouring generously into ready glasses. Laughter, excitement.

Slouch of hot coffee being gulped down from a saucer. Grinding of great molars in brown toast.

A terrible belch of alcoholic wind tearing up through the gullet and exploding outwardly.

[...].

Contentment: deep animal satisfaction. Rest. Night again.⁴⁰

The impressionistic language could be describing a banquet, although it is in fact a celebration of the simple pleasures of working-class life: laughter, excited talk, eating and drinking, and then the final luxury of relaxing; the images are sensual, frenzied, and animalistic.

In Barke's *The World his Pillow*, modernist techniques are put to different uses. The following passage illustrates how the heightened excitement and atmosphere of the advent of the war affects the villagers of Glenaraig. Unlike Grassie Gibbon, who uses italics to represent speech throughout *A Scots Quair* — although in none of his other novels — there are no indicators of speech in the following passage: the narrator's initial sentence becomes submerged in the polyphony, entangled in the confusion of ideologies:

The village gasped and stammered. The Germans have been preparing for this for years. Some say the King himself is a bit of a German. Who? Old Geordie? What! I'd like to hear any man say that to me. Lord Roberts is the man. But what about Kitchener? Our Iain is thinking that he will maybe go if they want him. Och, it will not last. No, no: it couldn't last. A fortnight will be seeing it all

⁴⁰ *The Wild Macraes*, p. 111.

over. A lot of bloody Germans will not be doing much. Wait and see. You just wait and see. Willie Sutherland is in the Territorials. Aye; and Donald MacIntyre's in the 7th A. and S. H. Och, yes, they're all being called up. Ah! But the regular army will see them through. You mind yon spies and their folding-up canoe? They came up the More in June. Artists, they said they were. Bloody spies! Sure the government has been sleeping. This has been going on for forty years. When we built a battleship, Germany built two. Two? A dozen, man. Yes, yes, a dozen. Now didn't I tell you this would happen? Did you see the price Finlayson is putting his sugar up to, at all? the imagination!⁴¹

The narrator's voice is unmistakeable: the first sentence concerns the narrator's statement about the confusion in the village. But the second— 'The Germans have been preparing for this for years' — begins the polyphony proper, and a number of voices are represented in the ensuing sentences: the passage is so effective because it leads the reader into the atmosphere of the confusion, and in so doing re-enforces its effect. It is impossible to tell how many voices are represented, and sometimes impossible to judge where one begins and the other ends. Barke's intention is to convey the atmosphere when war is declared, and what the above passage reveals is a mixture of emotions — surprise, indignation, anger, affirmation, certainty, uncertainty, disbelief and resignation among them. It is an expression of outsider modernism, of what happens when the political leaders themselves are in disarray.

The two quotations below are taken from a single uninterrupted passage from Gwyn Jones's *Times Like These*. They too are impressionistic, and indicate the turmoil felt by most people during the general strike of 1926, in which reports from newspapers and the radio vary greatly depending on which side of the political spectrum they fall. The style continues for almost two pages, of which these are two highlights:

⁴¹ *The World his Pillow*, pp. 153–54.

Uncertainty was the only certainty. Full main line services on railways — National Union of Railwaymen one hundred per cent. Drift back in Lancashire mills — Lancashire practically a hundred per cent. Nottinghamshire weakening — Notts miners a hundred per cent. Full tram services in Liverpool — Liverpool paralysed. Cardiff Docks in full swing (this by wireless on Sunday night) — complete standstill at Cardiff Docks (the message delivered by a filthy messenger on a filthy motor-cycle combination).⁴²

The phrases contradict each other as in *The World his Pillow*, although towards the end of the passage the language is a little different:

Then shattering news. Unions beaten! Unions beaten, lads. Don't believe it! Unions beaten! Unions beaten! We're licked. Unions beaten; strike in last stages; men drifting back to work; threats of victimisation; get back to work while you can; ultimatums from railway companies; ultimatums from transport boards; ultimatums to electricians, engineers, fitters; ultimatums, ultimatums, ultimatums; drift, drift, drift, drift. End of the strike in view; Trade Union leaders seek terms; Samuel intervenes; Samuel prepares terms; Samuel terms accepted by Unions; strike over. No — Miners' Federation rejects terms. Quarrels in the T. U. C.; acceptance — rejection; quarrels among men's leaders; strike over, except for miners, and they're always on strike, anyway; all back to work to-morrow; look after your own skins, lads; address by the Prime Minister to-morrow.⁴³

The contradictory reports are still there, but this second passage is a mixture of reportage and emotion. It concerns the reaction of the workers as it is revealed that the discussions with Herbert Samuel and the T. U. C. have resulted in the general strike being abandoned. Resignation sets in, and then there is a general return to normal working conditions. The second passage brings in a more human element, a reaction to the situation, in which the polyphony of the workers is evident. The repetition and enumeration are also reminiscent of Britton, particularly of his very long sentence

⁴² *Times Like These*, p. 162.

⁴³ *Times Like These*, p. 163.

reproduced in the following chapter, and it is significant that he should have chosen to dramatize this novel in particular. In the above passage, and in spite of the turmoil and the conflicting atmosphere, there is still the use of words of companionship or at least of shared experience in terms such as ‘lads’ and ‘we’. But there many instances in working-class literature in which the isolation and disconnection of which Stuart Laing speaks — although in relation to mainstream modernism — are more in evidence, when the language used expresses not togetherness or the shared experience of the turmoil of the outside world, but the isolation of the human mind. The difference, though, is that the expression of this isolation and disconnection is seen from the viewpoint of the working classes in opposition to the bourgeoisie or the ruling class.

Consciousness is vital in the work of Tilsley, who was without doubt influenced by Britton. When Allen Barclay is almost at the end of his wedding vows at the register office mentioned in the previous chapter, his attention focuses on a shop, highlights an example of the fluctuations of Allen’s consciousness:

The name of the shop was beheaded by the left-hand window-frame. HTON gleamed at Allen in big fat gold letters. He inclined slightly right, increasing the angle of vision. An S preceded the H. Must be Ashton. No, it could be Rushton — perhaps Rishton. He went over the vowels... The registrar was looking at him. ‘I will,’ said Allen.⁴⁴

As we have seen previously, the importance of the passage is not that Allen does not appreciate the significance of the occasion: quite the reverse, he feels intimidated by it, frightened by the *sense* of importance of it, because it ‘reek[s] of legal affairs’. He is partly afraid that he will be accused of something, and that the forbidding registrar will suddenly bring the proceedings to a close. His mind wanders because he needs to focus on something he can understand, something over which he has control. An inanimate

⁴⁴ *The Plebeian’s Progress*, p. 91.

object is necessary, and he logically applies his attention to the world outside the frightening register office. And the narrator follows the faltering path of his thoughts, moving from straightforward narrative statement very swiftly in an attempt to transcribe Allen's conflicting thoughts, as in: 'An S preceded the A. Must be Ashton. No, it could be Rushton – perhaps Rishton.' But these are only Allen's thoughts. There then follows an ellipsis, in which the bourgeois discourse takes over, and the registrar interrupts Allen's reverie: his 'I will' seems more of a submission to authority than anything else. Allen's class, youth and lack of self-confidence make him an easy prey to outsider angst, especially on official occasions, although the apparently trivial digression of interest to the shop fascia is also silently oppositional: Allen has already expressed his disliking for conventions when he has to wait for Anne at the register office, when the interior monologue has previously intruded on the social conventions of the time: 'Why in hell couldn't they have come together? Stupid superstitions.'⁴⁵

A much more anguished use of interior monologue is in F. C. Boden's first novel, *Miner*, where the young miner Danny has just experienced an explosion in which several miners die. As he walks home, the narrator appears to try to console him as Danny has fleeting hopes of the oblivion which his own death would bring when faced with such a miserable working life. They are not unlike the style the narrator uses to Arthur Phelps in *Hunger and Love*: 'Here, Dan, come on now, that's enough of that. Get on home and get a wash, and get out into the fresh air. Forget about it. It won't do a bit of good brooding over it. Come on, Dan, lad, get on home.'⁴⁶ Such is the empathy that it is impossible to tell if it is the narrator who is speaking, or whether Dan is telling himself to do the above things: the two voices have merged, as they often do in Britton's novel. But such an incident cannot be forgotten, and as he goes for a walk that evening, Danny is haunted by the

⁴⁵ *The Plebeian's Progress*, p. 90.

⁴⁶ *Miner*, p. 187.

memories of finding, with his colleague Frank, the charred but still living body of one of working-class fiction's many Arthurs. Questions of suicide again assail Danny as he remembers the horrors he has seen, and he contemplates a cycle of work at the mine alternating with longer periods of drawing money at the employment exchange, which, as the narrator ironically informs the reader, was once a place of entertainment (in obviously more prosperous times):

A shift in the pit and two on the dole!

'Is theer somebody on theer, Arthur?' came Frank's voice. He could see the thing trying to lift its hand and point along the level. A shift in the pit and two on the dole!

'Daniel Handby — three days — eight and sixpence,' the clerk in the skating-rink was crying faintly. A shift in the pit and three on the dole! Was it worth living for? Wouldn't it be better to end it, get out of it and be done with the pit for ever?⁴⁷

Among the most harrowing expressions of outsider angst is James Hanley's short story 'The Last Voyage', in which John Reilly — tormented to distraction by the younger crew — is to be dismissed from work on a ship because of his age. His feelings of reification intensify as he nears his last voyage. The expressionistic language is similar to the description of a nightmare, although he is awake:

He did not answer. Were now strange feelings in him. Heart was not there. Was an engine in its place. Ship's engine. Huge pistons rose and fell. He was beneath these pistons. His body was being hammered by them. All his inside was gone now and was only wind there. Wind seemed to blow round and round all through his frame. Gusts of wind. Were smothering him. Many figures were tramping in him. Voices. All shouting. All talking together. He could hear them. They were walking through him. Third engineer was one.

[...].

⁴⁷ *Miner*, p. 200.

All voices spoke as one now. He could not understand their words. And always this engine was moving, these pistons crushing him. Three o'clock in the morning and no sleep yet.⁴⁸

Reilly has not so much become a machine — far worse, he has the consciousness of being one: 'Heart was not there' excludes 'His' at the beginning, denoting a lack of possession of his own body. The fragmented language echoes the fragmented consciousness. His many aggressors (meaning his bosses and the crew who are in collusion with them) become one, and this is a force which is inside him, torturing him. At the end of the story, his only escape is to throw himself into the furnace where he works.

I conclude this chapter by analysing several passages in Britton's *Hunger and Love*, beginning by giving a brief examination of the naturalism in the novel, and then continuing with several examples of outsider modernism, all of which describe a certain state of mind, but often very differently. Unlike the many working-class books which contain outsider modernist passages very occasionally, *Hunger and Love* has many strong examples of it.

The narrator of *Hunger and Love* is not omniscient, although he of course has access to Arthur's mind. Possibly more importantly, the narrator is a mediator between Arthur and the outside world. Much of the novel is written in a very realistic style and shows a catalogue of poverty, and in a way Britton can be seen as a documentarist of life at the bottom of the social spectrum in Britain in the late 1920s, when most of the book was written. The narrator describes the filthy conditions Phelps lives in, as in 'the old woman's closely guarded collection of w. c. stinks, stale human sweat stench, seeping in a garbage stink and unwashed dustbin from the yard' (p. 355). Every rise in pay that Phelps receives and what he can or cannot buy with it, the price of things and what he will have left after spending on necessities, are recorded in detail, as are the hierarchical structures of the

⁴⁸ *Tramps, Workmates and Revolutionaries*, p. 67.

places he works in, and the nature of the work. As well as documenting poverty and its many (de)gradations, he also documents the book trade, about which he mentions such trade sources as the *Clique* and *Book Auction Records*, and the book sizes, bindings and conditions mentioned in the previous chapter. Throughout the novel there is an emphasis on science and evolution, usually told in huge didactic chunks by the narrator. Phelps's, and obviously the narrator's, interests clearly have a scientific bias: 'Meiosis ceases and mitosis begins, and presently here's you, a metabolic entity among phenomena', or in this second example which gives a good example of Britton's sense of humour, 'Well, Faustus, get your rods and cones on the job' (pp. 134, 344). But although Britton is documenting the life of a worker at the bottom of the class system, he by no means uses exclusively realist techniques.

Unlike many working-class works, *Hunger and Love* shows more than a few isolated examples of modernist techniques. Britton was very conscious that he was writing an experimental novel, which is certainly one of the reasons why he refused to allow publishers to interfere with his work: in response to Winifred Holtby's generally favourable review of *Spacetime Inn* in *Time and Tide*, Britton wrote a letter to her saying: 'I am trying to do new things with form, content and style.'⁴⁹ These words are almost a repeat of the advertisement for *Hunger and Love* mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 3. Britton's publisher, Constant Huntington, calls *Hunger and Love* 'the starting-point of something new in literature, and perhaps the beginning of that new development to which the novel must finally come'.⁵⁰ George Rees of the *Egyptian Gazette* also positively identifies *Hunger and Love* with modernism, as opposed to what modernists — and perhaps particularly Virginia Woolf — saw as old-fashioned in the realist novel of previous decades: 'There is no suggestion here of the polished inevitability and

⁴⁹ Lionel Britton, letter to Winifred Holtby.

⁵⁰ [Constant Huntington (?)], 'Hunger and Love', p. [1].

geometrical balance that characterizes [*sic*] the books of [Bennett and Galsworthy] and the lesser fry of an age that is rapidly being supplanted.’⁵¹

The modernist techniques in Lionel Britton’s novel are used in a different way from Barke’s techniques, and far from being a celebration of the working classes, and even further from being the bourgeois tool that Radek claimed that Joyce was using, Britton seizes modernist techniques as anti-bourgeois weapons. In *Hunger and Love*, they are layers over the documented facts (or perhaps a dovetailing of the two), sometimes appearing in the cracks of naturalism, a way of allowing the protagonist Arthur Phelps (or the narrator) to express himself, and a more direct way of attacking his bosses and by extension of attacking society at large. It is also, of course, a great howl of contempt. His modernist techniques frequently attack both the status quo and allow the reader a greater insight into Phelps’s mind, especially when in turmoil, and are often used in times of crisis. The relatively new outsider modernism we see emerging here in Britton’s and other writers’ works is quite different from that of mainstream modernism, and it would perhaps not be an exaggeration to suggest that Britton frequently (although by no means always) sees modernism as the language of the oppressed.

As previously stated, an early chapter of *Hunger and Love* is entitled ‘Mind-mining’, which like many chapters in the book is revealing in itself: this is quite distinct from the physical mining so often the subject of the working-class novel. One is reminded of what Virginia Woolf wrote in her diary in August 1923, when she was writing a novel she would later call *Mrs Dalloway*: ‘I should say a good deal about The Hours, & my discovery; how I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters’.⁵² In *Hunger and Love* the emphasis is on the cerebral: Arthur spends his time in thought, and the book is full of these

⁵¹ ‘An Epic of Hatred’, *Egyptian Gazette*.

⁵² *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Ann Olivier Bell, 5 vols (London: The Hogarth Press, 1977–84), II: 1920–1924 (1978), 263.

thoughts, sometimes randomly scattered, often more logically exposed. The learning process is displayed to the reader by Arthur's constant remarks about his own thoughts, as for instance in this: 'A citizen of no mean city. Litotes' (p. 371). The first sentence is a quotation from the Bible (Acts 21: 39), and is here obviously intended to be ironic. (It is incidentally also a sentence that Barke uses in one of his outsider modernist sections of *Major Operation*.)⁵³ Britton may well have been aware that the sentence was not an uncommon example of the use of litotes, but the juxtaposition is nevertheless significant. Arthur has mentioned this word before, along with various other tropes that he has learned: we are frequently informed of the fruits of his self-tuition. But if Britton seriously intended the above remark as a mere display of self-taught pyrotechnics on Phelps's part, it would surely be a damp squib. Rather, Britton is aware that 'litotes' is a Greek word, coming from the original seat of democracy, that Phelps has a very lowly status in the city in which he lives, and that he does not think 'his' country is at all democratic. Britton is driving his political — and frequently anti-religious — points home, and a very effective way of doing this is to use society's own platitudes.

The voice of another person is often imagined, and without inverted commas, as in this example when Phelps receives a reply to a job application: 'Right! Gutter-snipe, you'd like a better job! D'you think you'll get it in those clothes?' (p.175). This is an odd mixture of Arthur's opinion of himself and of his idea of the interviewer's future opinion of him: a kind of predictive ventriloquism. There are very few uses, for example, of 'he said' or 'she replied' because, on the occasions when the reader sees him in the 'objective' world outside, Britton intends his use of direct speech to have the maximum impact, a much more immediate effect.

In one passage — if it is removed from its context (and the first part of which was

⁵³ *Major Operation*, p. 121.

mentioned earlier in the thesis) — Britton uses a modernist technique with no apparent criticism of the bourgeois class. As Arthur is going homewards down Putney Hill one Sunday evening, the narrator makes the following comment, again using the second person:

Down the hill you come. Circles of light under the lamps, stretches of darkness in between; circles of light, stretches of darkness; down the hill. Ether vibrations, ether deserts, light and darkness, coming towards you, going away from you; and into the light, into the darkness, coming towards you, going away from you, keeping ahead of you, falling behind you, passing by you, dainty feet, transparent stockings, neat shoes, pat-pat, pat-pat, with the swaying draperies above them, the hints of glorious flesh coming and going with the movements of the muscles under the muslin, under the cotton print, under the silk (p. 217).

The passage is partly about sexual frustration, partly about evanescence, about how that which is within one's grasp rapidly moves out of it within the passing of an instant, as the fluctuations of time transform reality. Yet there is continuation in the rhythm of the piece, light and darkness constantly alternating — 'Circles of light under the lamps, stretches of darkness in between; circles of light, stretches of darkness'. There is a musicality to the passage, and the flickering movements of Arthur's consciousness are intensely cinematic, relating to the world of film in which Britton was so interested. But this is not a display of how poetic Britton can be. In the sentence before this quotation the narrator says, 'During the day there had been sunshine, and now the earth had whirled on and got in between you and the sun, and now there was darkness.' The true meaning of the passage had already been explained. The 'circles of light, stretches of darkness' do not merely relate to the rhythm of the lights of the streetlamps and the darkness between them as they pass in and out of the consciousness of the walker. And the 'coming towards you, going away from you' does not merely relate to the young women as they shine in the light and disappear into

the dark. The rhythm is the rhythm of the life of trade, with the sun of Sunday being the only light the working-classes are allowed before the darkness of the world of trade swallows them up for another week.

The following passage is the closest the novel moves towards a love scene, but even here trade intervenes. Arthur has deep feelings for Miss Wyman which transcend adolescent sexual frustration, and the following is an illustration of the conflict he feels on looking at the beauty that his penniless state renders unattainable:

But the blood is going round inside the darkness of your body and your will is no longer under your control, and the outline and boundary of your existence have become vague: here in the shop, in the middle of low and base activities, at the ordering of mean and sordid minds, you have a sense of catching up with the meaning of the world. And you know your shirt is hanging out; and never has been properly clean. And I know you are making a game of me, but I wouldn't care a damn what happened to the earth if only this could keep on forever (p. 42).

The external world, the shape of Miss Wyman, is having a profound effect on the mind and body of Arthur, who, despite the distorting filter of the external world of trade, is beginning to understand the 'meaning of the world'. In sympathy with this understanding, or perhaps as a mark of it, the narrative shifts voices. The first person singular appears outside quotation marks a number of times in the novel, including an occasion shortly before the above passage, although its use is occasionally ambiguous: usually the 'I' refers to the narrator, although sometimes there is a doubt if it is the narrator or Arthur. In the example above, there is no ambiguity at all. The narrator begins with the second person and ends by merging with the character to become 'I', as opposed to the 'you' that Miss Wyman has become: the narrator and Arthur, very briefly, have become one. With regard to Arthur's awareness of the apparent 'game' Miss Wyman is playing with him, it would also appear, in spite of the ambivalence of Miss Wyman's feelings towards him, that the moment is as near to Arthur's idea of

perfection as possible. Arthur/the narrator would have the moment last forever, although he/they realise(s) that it is impossible. This is an example of the narrator's bringing together the inner and the outer world. It seems to be a means of making the outsider appear to be less of an outsider, and as such is probably an example of one of the aims of outsider modernism.

The following episode is an illustration of the division between inner and outer worlds, of the difference between the ontologized and the reified Arthur. Unsurprisingly, it is the bourgeois world which creates the problems. Sometimes, the narrator addresses Arthur as 'he' or 'you' with apparent lack of discrimination, or at other times to avoid confusion because there is another male person in the story. But often the 'he' represents a public, objectified Arthur whom the narrator sees as a wage slave, whereas the 'you' represents an independent, subjective Arthur with whom the narrator strongly identifies, and who is associated with 'life', which above all means the freedom to read. Consequently, I shall refer to these two often distinct types as 'the he-Arthur' and 'the you-Arthur', where the former indicates the depersonalization of the world of trade (and by extension possibly even the outside world in general), whereas the latter signals more of an ontological state.

In an episode leading up to his dismissal, the grocery assistant Arthur follows a customer (whom he calls 'Madame Importance') to her flat, symbolically carrying a heavy basket of vegetables on his head: trade weighs heavily on his mind, impinging on his thoughts. To illustrate this, the language used to describe the delivery is typically telegraphic (and rather similar to what Bertrand Russell refers to as Britton's 'head-line abbreviation'), indicative of Arthur's perfunctory attitude to the job: 'Top landing, door open, in kitchen, whup, off your head and on to the kitchen table' (p. 18). Arthur imagines that his head, now relieved of its heavy burden of vegetables, will be free to 'steal' a little time from his employer in order to read *Palgrave's Golden Treasury* in the sun: 'What you want is culture. What you want is life' (p. 18).

But the next two sentences very clearly illustrate the split between the public and the personal Arthurs. The paragraph begins: “‘Just a minute!’” a voice said behind him. And instantly the basket was seized out of your hand as you are turning away’ (p. 18). Seizing the basket, Madame Importance re-acquaints Arthur with the world of trade by taking from him a symbol of that world, and at the same time she reaffirms his existence in that world by her verbal and physical intervention in the subjective world into which he has just returned. For a few brief moments, Arthur thought that the world of trade was ‘behind him’ both physically and mentally, and that he could once more retreat into the world of self-education. But the terse command pulls him back to the world of commerce, where only the he-Arthur exists. However, even in the first sentence, Madame Importance becomes an apparently disembodied voice: the narrator is raising his own voice, and by extension, of course, Arthur’s voice too — and against the business world — by objectifying her. In the second sentence there is a similar occurrence, and in the words ‘And instantly the basket was seized out of your hand’, the use of the passive voice without an agent distances Madame Importance further. And Arthur has perhaps not altogether de-ontologized. The restoration of the you-Arthur briefly returns him to the subjective universe, and ‘as you are turning away’ also has this effect, the use of the present continuous tense reinforcing the allegiance between the narrator and Arthur.

Madame Importance then loads the basket with loose cabbage leaves, and the he-Arthur puts the basket back on his head on his slightly circuitous route back to the shop. Unseen by his enemies defending the world of commerce, the you-Arthur snatches a moment’s respite: ‘Now you can laze back to the shop, workwards, trundle, back street, solitude, upturned bushel, sun energy tingling down the back of your neck, Milton’s Ode on the Nativity. Life’ (p. 19). Arthur is oblivious to the consternation he has caused by spilling the cabbage leaves on the stairs, but with his return to the shop and his subsequent dismissal

from employment, the narrative returns the reader to the he-Arthur: he is an expendable commodity.

At one point in the novel, the narrator's thoughts dwell on Wordsworth's writing poetry as common speech: 'it's so simple one can hardly grasp that it has never been thought of before' (p. 143). So saying, the narrator often attempts to go beyond this, to write from within Arthur as he actually thinks, using the modernist interior monologue technique. One example of this is in the 'All Balls' chapter, when Arthur is packing his possessions after having been discovered having a prostitute in his room, and is then forced to move out of his lodgings:

Well, my lad, tie your belongings together. Useful invention, string. Must have been string of a sort that tied old Aesop's faggots together. It was string, too, that tied the brick to the cat's neck and the can to the dog's tail. Knots; good stuff, knots. One piece of matter gets in the way of another piece of matter. Granny's knot, true-lover's knot, hangman's knot. What God has joined let no man put asunder. There is something one day mankind will tie up tight, and NO man will put it asunder. Hanging, they do say, is too good for them. Judge not, that ye be not judged (p. 371).

There is a Joycean ring to the passage, although there is no evidence that Britton had read *Ulysses*. And again, it is unclear if the 'Well, my lad' is the voice of Arthur mentally talking to himself, or the voice of the narrator speaking in a reassuring way towards him, although it is more likely to be Arthur encouraging himself. Certainly the other sentences in the paragraph seem to be a representation of Arthur's thoughts. The language is moving by an association of ideas from one thing to the next, much more in line with Arthur's thoughts than with his actions. Forced out of his home to certain virtually identical squalor elsewhere, Arthur's only possible refuge is internal. As he ties up his meagre possessions, Arthur thinks of how useful the invention of string is. He then moves to thoughts of the substance that bound the faggots in Aesop's 'The Bundle of Sticks', where a dying father tries to teach his sons that co-operation is the

only way that progress will ever be achieved. The political associations are perhaps obvious here, and Britton is once more flying his political colours. This is of course Britton's central idea in *Hunger and Love*, and also one that is central to his plays. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that the health Britton associates with co-operation should immediately be followed by images of brutality, the opposite of mutual co-operation — tying a brick to a cat's neck (presumably to drown it), and tying a can to a dog's tail (presumably for a sadistic game). Typically with Britton, Arthur's mind then moves to a more scientific way of looking at knots: 'One piece of matter gets in the way of another piece of matter.' From there, the thesaurus takes over with its knotty associations: 'Granny's knot, true-lover's knot, hangman's knot.' And then Arthur's mind picks up on the second phrase: 'What God has joined let no man put asunder.' This sentence not only links the words of the Christian marriage ceremony to the Bible (Matthew 19: 6), but is also an ironic allusion to the perceived unholy 'marriage' of Arthur to a prostitute the night before. It is also, of course, a criticism of the sexual mores of the time, and in the next sentence, which still continues the idea of the knot, the narrator (or Arthur) delivers his full fury: 'There is something one day mankind will tie up tight, and NO man will put it asunder.' For the exact meaning of this, the reader needs to continue: 'Hanging, they do say, is too good for them. Judge not, that ye be not judged'. In the final sentence, and for the first time in the paragraph, there is no mention of the knot that provided the initial impetus for the movement of the paragraph, or the movement of Arthur's thoughts. But there is still a link: hanging reminds Arthur of the judge who proclaims the death sentence, but also of the Bible he detested at school but enjoyed for the 'dirty bits'. The paragraph as a whole, and in particular this closing sentence, shows how Britton uses the interior monologue to throw religion back in the face of the purveyors of it, and in so doing he turns the Bible on its head and exposes religious practitioners for the hypocrites that he believes them

to be. At the same time, of course, it implicates the legal profession, and governments which draw up the laws. After this, it becomes more obvious that in the sentence about tying 'them' up, the 'them' relates to the whole Establishment, and that Britton looks forward to the destruction of the state. There is clearly nothing bourgeois or elitist in this paragraph, but everything to show that Britton is using modernist techniques to effective ends in his indictment of institutions.

Perhaps more than any other, the final chapter — 'Towards Infinity' — reveals the narrator's full hatred of the status quo and his use of modernist devices to denounce it. As someone who had 'suffered injury and hardship at the hands of hysterical mobs' and received an eighteen-month prison sentence for refusing to fight for 'his' country, Britton unleashes his contempt for the warmongers in this section (pp. 663–705). A crescendo builds with various voices vying against Arthur in their support for the war. The language sometimes proceeds logically, but sometimes fragments as the narrator tries to convey the hysteria of the time. When war is declared, the narrative falls apart. Often, quotation marks are not used, and the narrative takes on different voices. It is not always possible to tell what is parody, irony, the voice of propaganda, or the propaganda suggesting things in Arthur's mind, such is the polyphony: 'Ear that one, 'Erbert?', 'Lloyd George is a good man; telling phrases; stirs your blood', and 'Be a bit of a spree, of course. Journey to France' (pp. 678, 679). The reader has access to his conflicting thoughts about the possibilities of going to France: 'Might lose a couple of eyes. Or a jaw. — There are girls in France. Girls are freer there. Plenty of girls. — Coition. Is it worth it? Eye poked out, doodle shot off: what's the use of girls to you, then?' (p. 679). Whatever the effect of the propaganda, any incentive to fight either for financial survival and the possible spin-offs from sexual gratification are automatically negated in Arthur's mind. Above all, there is no patriotic feeling whatever. Here the 'you' is occasionally, perhaps, a synonym of the impersonal 'one', but more often than not it seems as though the now mature Arthur has

merged with the narrator again: it is more of an 'I'. The propagandistic sentence

'Kitchener wants you' is repeated twice, although urgency is denoted by the fact that the second time it is in small capitals, the third in large capitals. The outer voice merges with the inner to produce a dialogue:

KITCHENER WANTS YOU!

Let him damn well want! (p. 680).

Often, it is clear that the voice is speaking out against the propaganda: 'Rally to your country. Our profits will go down. In the name of the Lord! Blood, blood, blood! Profits will go down. In the name of the Flag! Blood, blood, blood, blood!' (p. 689). The final voice is filtered through the bishops, politicians and the bourgeoisie, and is without doubt Britton's own. It is a good example of the polyvocality or heteroglossia of the language that Bakhtin writes about, and although this is not 'concealed speech' because Britton uses speech marks, it is quite evident that he is parodying the government and those in general whom he perceives to be warmongers.⁵⁴

In the 1930s mainstream modernism had by no means dealt a deathblow to realism, but nor was realism firmly ensconced in its former secure position. The world had changed radically. Time, space and matter were no longer absolute, everything had fragmented, and there was no longer a common external reality with which to cement the self, or rather, reality was not only unknown but also unknowable. The unconscious mind had opened up untold horrors, and the working classes, women, and other political minorities were knocking on the door of reform or revolution. The nineteenth century finally seemed to be dying after the war. Far from the 1930s being a return to realist form, the years leading up to World War II reveal an appropriation of mainstream literary modernism by certain

⁵⁴ Michael Holquist, ed., *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, University of Texas Press Slavic Series, 1 (Austin: University of Texas, c.1981; repr. 2004), pp. 301–31.

political minorities. These writers had evolved an outsider modernism through which to express their hopes and fears and into which, and to varying degrees, they incorporated their writings. Above all, and this is something which is particularly powerful in Britton's *Hunger and Love*, outsider modernism is very often not just an expression of solidarity with its fellow 'sufferers' — it is also a scream of contempt for those who represented the status quo, those who perpetuated the exclusion of political minorities. In short, it is an expression of alienation.

CHAPTER 5

Alienation and Escape

In my 'Lionel Britton's Place in Working-Class Fiction' chapter I identified Britton with that particular sub-genre and in the following 'Outsider Modernism' chapter I detailed a more specific dimension of working-class fiction in the works of several authors. In this chapter I extend the outsider writing category already analysed to include other political minorities whose work essentially concerns alienation. It is important to note from the beginning, though, that the outsider is a relatively common character in mainstream writing of this period, or indeed other periods, and not just limited to minorities. Gertrude Stein, for instance, popularized the expression 'The Lost Generation' which she applied to a group of North American writers and artists voluntarily exiled in Paris after World War I; Carole Angier talks of a wider geographical area, of a 'shared obsession of thousands of newly uprooted people', and says that 'pessimism and nihilism' were 'everywhere in the postwar world', and specifically mentions Conrad, Kafka, Canetti and Céline.¹

In this chapter, I analyse aspects of alienation in writers who have generally received less critical attention, those who have not usually been included in what might, very tentatively, be classed as the traditional outsider literature canon. As well as déclassé writers such as Lionel Britton and John Hampson, also belonging to this group are Jean Rhys and her deracinated women, Winifred Holtby and her spinsters, the homosexuals Rhys Davies and John Hampson again, and Mulk Raj Anand and his depiction of downtrodden workers in India, the country of his birth. The work of all of these writers shed light on the alienation shown in *Hunger and Love*.

¹ Carole Angier, *Jean Rhys: Life and Work* (London: Deutsch, 1990), p. 218.

The word 'alienation' perhaps almost automatically suggests Marx to many people, and although he fits comfortably into the context of *Hunger and Love*, Marx's ideas are not the most logical for a theoretical basis of this chapter because he is essentially concerned with alienation in the working classes, notably in the work place: Marx's work does not readily tie in with the larger group of outsiders I am analysing in this chapter. Sartre and Beauvoir's use of alienation, on the other hand, can be used to embrace all political minority groups. I have therefore chosen their ideas as more appropriate for analysis and analogy in the work of this wider group.

Probably the most concise definition of alienation is given in Raymond Williams's *Keywords* (1976), in which he makes use of Melvin Seeman's influential definition in his article 'On the Meaning of Alienation' in *American Sociological Review* (1959). Williams sums up Seeman's interpretation of alienation in the following way:

- (a) *powerlessness* — an inability or a feeling of inability to influence the society in which we live;
- (b) *meaninglessness* — a feeling of lack of guides for conduct and belief, with (c) *normlessness* — a feeling that illegitimate means are required to meet approved goals; (d) *isolation* — estrangement from given norms and goals; (e) *self-estrangement* — an inability to find genuinely satisfying activities.²

The relevance of this definition to the writers I mention, and its relevance to the atheistic existential theories of Sartre and Beauvoir, are crucial to an understanding of this chapter. Williams's first category can be expanded to include a feeling of dispossession, either literal because of the lack of property or a physical homeland, or a deeper, although more vague, ontological disenfranchisement; in addition, meaninglessness is very often accompanied by feelings of the absurdity of life, perhaps along with feelings of reification, or being (used as) a mere object. My argument will

² Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana, 1976; rev. and expanded Flamingo, 1983; repr. Fontana Press, 1988), p. 36.

not only include an analysis of the manifestations of alienation in particular literary works, but also its causes and any possibility of escape from that state.

It might be argued — with some justification — that Dadaism or surrealism, with their anarchistic sentiments, and their contempt for institutions and social niceties, would be a more appropriate perspective through which to view *Hunger and Love* in particular; and it could also be argued that these movements are more in keeping with the time *Hunger and Love* was written. However, Sartrean existentialism also has strong links with anarchism and also holds institutions and social conventions in contempt; and although existentialism did not come to widespread public attention until the 1940s and beyond, it is evident that Sartre had constructed the essential foundations of his philosophy as early as 1926: Annie Cohen-Solal notes that in this year, in a work published in the magazine *Les Nouvelles littéraires* (and which Beauvoir also quotes in some detail to make the same point), ‘one can detect the future themes of both *Nausea* and *Being and Nothingness*’: in other words, Sartre and Britton began working on their projects at around the same time.³ Also of note is that Russell, in a letter to Britton in 1948, gives Sartre as the only person who could be of any help to Britton, as he too ‘combines philosophy with works of imagination’; the nature of Britton’s work is not mentioned.⁴ Perhaps more importantly, both Sartre and Beauvoir were sympathetic to the plight of political minorities, and Beauvoir, for instance, had joined ‘*Équipes Sociales*’ [‘Social Teams’] — an organization founded by her literature teacher Robert Garric with a view to bringing culture to the working classes — in 1926, when she was eighteen.⁵ I shall make references to Sartre’s key existential work, *L’Être et le néant* (1943), and also to *L’Existentialisme est un humanisme* (1946), a paper

³ Annie Cohen-Solal, *Sartre: A Life* (London: Heinemann, 1987; repr. Minerva, 1991), p. 68; Simone de Beauvoir, *Mémoires d’une jeune fille rangée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1958; repr. 1976), pp. 478–79.

⁴ Bertrand Russell, letter to Lionel Britton, 3 December 1948, HB.

⁵ Terry Keefe, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Study of her Writings* (London: Harrap, 1983), p. 11.

that briefly defines existentialism, and which Sartre originally read to the Club Maintenant in 1945.⁶ In addition, I refer to Sartre's first novel, *La Nausée* (1938), in order to illustrate some of my points: it is an excellent example of his early philosophy as summarized in his fiction.⁷ The inclusion of Beauvoir is necessary because she brought a vital feminization to existentialism, and as Margaret Simons says: 'the simplistic view reducing Beauvoir to Sartre is inadequate for a full comprehension of her work'.⁸ And although Beauvoir retained the basic tenets of Sartrean existentialism, Simons also indicates a few areas of Beauvoir's work which suggest a (publicly unacknowledged) influence on Sartre, notably her early work on the Other, particularly in relation to 'the look' mentioned below. Simons believes that Beauvoir anticipated Sartre in *L'Invitée* (1943), and more famously in *Le Deuxième sexe* (1949) where she used the concept of the Other to apply to political minorities, whereas Sartre did not use the expression in this more specific sense — not even in *Réflexions sur la question juive* (1946) — until he wrote

⁶ Jean –Paul Sartre, *L'Être et le néant: essai d'ontologie phénoménologique* [*Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*] (Paris: Gallimard, 1943; repr. 1976); Jean–Paul Sartre, *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme* [lit. 'Existentialism Is a Humanism'] (Paris: Nagel, 1946; trans. by Philip Mairet as *Existentialism and Humanism* (London: Methuen, 1948; repr. 1982)). (All translations from French texts are my own unless otherwise indicated.)

⁷ Jean–Paul Sartre, *La Nausée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938; repr. 1972; trans. by Robert Baldick as *Nausea* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965)). Baldick accurately translates the expression '*la Nausée*' as 'the Nausea' throughout the book: by including the definite article and capitalizing the noun, he is indicating that Sartre is describing a state of consciousness which is very familiar to the protagonist, which is in some respects very similar to an affliction, and virtually the personification of absurdity. Logically, then, 'The Nausea' would be a more appropriate title, but presumably the expediencies of the publishing world dictated otherwise.

⁸ I do not use the surname 'de Beauvoir' because, although some English critics and biographers use the expression, the majority use 'Beauvoir', which is also invariably the form used in her native country; Margaret A. Simons, 'Beauvoir and Sartre: The Philosophical Relationship', *Yale French Studies*, 72 (1986), 165–79 (pp. 167, 169).

Saint Genet (1952).⁹ Nevertheless, when Simons interviewed Beauvoir in 1979, Beauvoir claimed that she was ‘completely influenced by Sartre, on whose philosophical perspective she could have no influence at all since she was not herself a philosopher’.¹⁰ For Beauvoir, a ‘philosopher’ is someone like Spinoza, Hegel, or Sartre, someone who ‘builds a grand system’. The point she is making is clear, although Beauvoir’s self-deprecating claim appears to be merely reinforcing her own ideas about the difficulty for women to project themselves into the future.

It would be largely irrelevant, and certainly far beyond the scope of this chapter, to even summarize atheistic existentialism, so I limit myself to a few existentialist concepts that can profitably be applied to the kind of literature of alienation I am dealing with here. Broadly speaking, the three categories are nothingness, *mauvaise foi*, and transcendence, although I often unavoidably combine two or all of these because they are closely interlinked.¹¹

⁹ Simone de Beauvoir, *L’Invitée* [lit. ‘The (Female) Guest’, trans. as *She Came to Stay*] (Paris: Gallimard, 1943; repr. 1977); Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième sexe*, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1949; repr. 1975); Jean-Paul Sartre, *Réflexions sur la question juive* [lit. ‘Reflections on the Jewish Question’, trans. as *Anti-Semite and Jew*] (Paris: Morihien, 1946; repr. Gallimard, 1954); Jean-Paul Sartre, *Saint Genet: comédien et martyr* (Paris: Gallimard, 1952; repr. 2004).

¹⁰ ‘Beauvoir and Sartre’, p. 168.

¹¹ ‘*Mauvaise foi*’ is a concept central to understanding atheistic existentialism, although it is very difficult to find a suitable English translation for it. The literal ‘bad faith’ is clearly not a conventional English expression, except perhaps in a religious context. In a footnote in the Introduction to his translation of *L’Existentialisme est un humanisme*, Philip Mairet points out ‘I have nearly always translated [*mauvaise foi*] as “self-deception”’ (p. 16 n.). He does not expand on this, although it is in the word ‘nearly’ that the problem lies. ‘Self-deception’ is an adequate translation in many instances, although there are other occasions when Sartre — and Beauvoir — speak of various kinds of ‘inauthenticity’ (an expression used more or less synonymously with *mauvaise foi*, with its opposite being the transcendent ‘authenticity’) such as particular lies or hypocrisies, where ‘self-deception’ would be inaccurate or in other ways inadequate. Another complication with *mauvaise foi* and lying is that they often take bastardized forms, representing what Sartre calls ‘intermediary states’ between lying and *mauvaise foi*. For these reasons I have retained the original French expression *mauvaise foi* — with qualifications where necessary — throughout this chapter.

Sartrean existentialism begins by stating that God does not exist. Existence therefore precedes essence (or (self-)definition), meaning that we are existentially abandoned. From birth, we are contingent in a valueless world where there is no determinism nor (therefore) any human nature.¹² In such a world without any initial meaning, any direct relationship between interior and exterior is non-existent, and absurdity is therefore the norm; this feeling of nothingness or meaninglessness is vividly expressed in *La Nausée*. One of Sartre's most noted expressions from *L'Être et le néant* is that 'we are what we are not, and we are not what we are'.¹³ This means that, unlike man-made objects, we have no essence to begin with, and must constantly project ourselves forwards into the future and away from what we were: 'by transcendence [or projecting myself forwards into the future as a subject], I escape from everything that I am.'¹⁴ There is no exact correspondence between past and future, as the present continuously disappears into the past. By transcending ourselves, which is in effect another way of saying by freely engaging with the outside world, we are constantly renewing our definition of ourselves. We are the total product of all our actions, meaning our past. (Self-)definition, then, is our essence for Sartre, although this is of course an understanding of essence not as the fixed state that one might perhaps imagine, but as something which is perpetually changing. We are in constant anguish, which is in part caused by the feeling of nothingness, and we must keep defining ourselves within this freedom. In our transcendence, though, we are responsible not only for ourselves but also for others, as Sartre believes that in choosing our own freedom it is incoherent of us not to choose the freedom of others too (which is also a major cause of anguish). Sartre says '[Man] realizes that he cannot be anything [...]

¹² In *L'Être et le néant*, Sartre uses the expression 'original contingency', which seems perhaps too close to 'original sin' to be a coincidence. In Sartre's existentialism, though, because there is no God, the problems exist from the beginning, and there is therefore no equivalent of the Fall.

¹³ *L'Être et le néant*, *passim*.

¹⁴ *L'Être et le néant*, p. 92.

unless others recognize him as such. To discover any truth at all about myself I have to do so via others. Others are indispensable to my existence'.¹⁵ This, then, is how we discover both others and our true selves: different consciousnesses surging into the future. Sartre's expression for this is 'inter-subjectivity'. But encountering others introduces another problem for our transcendence, because Sartre sees life as conflict, and the 'look' of others is a strategy of alienation which transforms a person into an object, the only solution to which is to 'look' at the other person in return, and in so doing alienate him or her. Interior and exterior thus become one through mutual transcendence, or inter-subjectivity. The process of self-definition is only finalized on our death. It is relevant to note here that Beauvoir believes that because of the dominance of society by men, it is more difficult for women — and married women in particular — to become transcendent. Although Beauvoir acknowledges that there have been positive changes in society regarding its attitude towards women, she remains conscious of the great burden that a woman carries: 'today still, although her position is evolving, woman is severely handicapped'.¹⁶ Nevertheless, Beauvoir believes that 'In reality, all human existence is transcendence and immanence at the same time'.¹⁷ She looks towards a different world with some hope: 'The future can only lead to an increasingly stronger assimilation of woman into the masculine world of the recent past.'¹⁸

But the pathway leading out of nothingness and into transcendence, for man *or* woman, is troubled by *mauvaise foi*, a very intricate and paradoxical psychological mechanism which needs to be explained in a little detail. Terry Keefe has drawn attention to some rather vague examples of Beauvoir's (and of Sartre's too): they sometimes very loosely use

¹⁵ *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme*, pp. 66–67.

¹⁶ *Le Deuxième sexe*, I, 22.

¹⁷ *Le Deuxième sexe*, II, 15.

¹⁸ *Le Deuxième sexe*, I, 170.

the expression '*mauvaise foi*' to mean ordinary lying, and even include straightforward errors, which is plainly inconsistent with existentialist philosophy as defined by Sartre himself.¹⁹ Sartre makes it quite clear that *mauvaise foi* cannot arise from a simple error or from ignorance, and that it exists in a paradoxical realm in which we are aware of one thing but convince ourselves of something very different. *Mauvaise foi* is a specific kind of lie: 'We will readily accept that *mauvaise foi* is a lie to oneself, if lying to oneself is at the same time distinguished from ordinary lying.'²⁰ *Mauvaise foi* involves 'concealing an unpleasant truth or presenting a pleasant error as a truth', and 'any man who hides behind the excuse of his passions, any man who invents a determinism is a man of *mauvaise foi*'.²¹ *Mauvaise foi* therefore exists in a determined world in which human nature is — in error according to Sartre, of course — often thought to exist, and which is also the most important barrier to our freedom. *Mauvaise foi* is, in fact, an escape from freedom, indeed a form of alienation in itself, although many people choose it because of the comfort it affords: it objectifies them, and therefore invests them with an often static, artificial essence. *Mauvaise foi* is 'inauthentic', and as such is a means of escaping from freedom and retreating into reification, and therefore any possibilities of self-definition (or essence): it seeks to deny our ability to overcome the absurdity, or the 'original contingency' into which we are born, and prevents us from behaving 'authentically', by

¹⁹ Terry Keefe, 'Simone de Beauvoir and Sartre on *Mauvaise Foi*', *French Studies*, 34 (1980), 300–14.

²⁰ *L'Être et le néant*, p. 82.

²¹ *L'Être et le néant*, p. 83; *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme*, pp. 80–81.

which Sartre means in *bonne foi*.²² Sartre divides those people in *mauvaise foi* into two categories — the ‘cowards’ who hide behind their serious airs and deterministic excuses, and the (usually bourgeois) ‘scum’ who believe their existence is necessary.²³ (Some analogies between *mauvaise foi* and ‘false consciousness’ — a ‘Marxist’ expression originally coined by Engels but never in fact used by Marx — are evident, although it would be a digression to pursue the issue here.)²⁴

Jean Rhys’s books are filled with men who are very similar to Sartre’s ‘scum’. And Rhys is also relevant to Britton in several respects: as a doctor’s daughter and a white Creole woman from Dominica who moved to England and began working as a chorus girl, she was a kind of *déclassé* figure; in some ways her female characters are similar to Arthur Phelps: both live at the mercy of dominant males, and both have an inferior social status. Rhys’s protagonists are outsiders in an absurd world, and in fact the absurd for Jean Rhys’s characters is very much an everyday reality, as it of course is for Sartre and Phelps. Her women’s lives are financially commanded by men who treat women as their toys, or dolls to be more specific. In *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939) Sasha watches the shop ‘dolls’, ‘thinking what a success they would have made of their lives if they had been women. Satin skin, silk hair, velvet eyes, sawdust heart — all complete.’²⁵ This is a

²² The translation of ‘*bonne foi*’ (an expression used infrequently by Sartre but nevertheless significant) creates a similar problem to *mauvaise foi*, although in a different way. The Sartrean *bonne foi* is an antonym of *mauvaise foi*, and as such is more positive than the English ‘good faith’; unlike ‘bad faith’, ‘good faith’ is certainly an expression in common English usage, and although it indicates an act performed with good intentions, it is usually used retrospectively as an explanation or an excuse for an action that has negative consequences. ‘Good faith’ is in fact a more exact translation of the French ‘*bonne conscience*’ [lit. ‘good consciousness’ or ‘good conscience’]. I therefore again retain the original French expression.

²³ *L’Existentialisme est un humanisme*, pp. 84–85.

²⁴ Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 89.

²⁵ Jean Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* (London: Constable, 1939; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 16.

frequent image of Rhys's, and in her much later *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), the unnamed Rochester character speaks of Antoinette as both a 'doll' and a 'marionette'.²⁶

In *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (1930), Julia Martin's existential torment is plainly depicted; on the day of her mother's funeral, a kind of nausea grips her: 'all the time she stood, knelt, and listened she was tortured because her brain was making a huge effort to grapple with nothingness'.²⁷ Unable to project herself into the future, she is locked into the absurdity of existence. On another occasion, Julia speaks to Uncle Griffiths about having left her husband, and then an argument follows between them in which 'She felt as though her real self had taken cover, as though she had retired somewhere far off and was crouching warily, like an animal, watching her body in the armchair arguing with Uncle Griffiths about the man she had loved'.²⁸ Frequently, there are splits of this nature between the mind and the body of Jean Rhys's female characters which seem to verge on the pathological; Rhys herself once told an unnamed Frenchman that she could 'abstract [herself] from [her] body'.²⁹ The Frenchman was shocked, although Sartre would of course see this as a normal part of existence.

Other people pose a problem for Rhys's protagonists. Julia reveals a kind of inversion of existentialism in which she states that we have a form of essence as children, but lose it when we mature and others intrude upon our existence:

²⁶ Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, (London: Deutsch, 1966; repr. Penguin, 2000), *passim*.

²⁷ Jean Rhys, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (London: Cape, 1930; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 94.

²⁸ *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, p. 59.

²⁹ Jean Rhys, *Smile Please: An Unfinished Autobiography* (London: Deutsch, 1979), p. 118.

When you are a child you are yourself and you know and see everything prophetically.

And then suddenly something happens and you stop being yourself, you become what others force you to be. You lose your wisdom and your soul.³⁰

This is in fact a common occurrence in Rhys's female characters, particularly in times of crisis, and one of the strategies used by them — perhaps in an attempt to preserve their sanity, although nonetheless in *mauvaise foi* — is a mental return to this paradisiacal state of childhood. In *Voyage in the Dark* (1934) Walter terminates his relationship with Anna, who later puts her head in the bath and listens to the tap water running, which reminds her of her childhood in the Caribbean: 'I would pretend it was a waterfall, like the one that falls into the pool where we bathed at Morgan's Rest.'³¹ And in *Quartet* (originally published as *Postures*, 1928), after Marya has begun her extra-marital affair with Heidler, 'A horrible nostalgia, an ache for the past seized her', and she immediately thinks of two lines of a children's song in French, which relate to permanent loss.³² Rhys's female protagonists seem to be essentialists, then, inventing a determinism for themselves, being thrust out of their childhood Garden of Eden by others, who for Rhys are of course overwhelmingly male. This is evidently quite distinct from Sartre's 'original contingency', but rather adulthood seen as the Fall, where we lose our essence and the absurdity begins. Other people, then, bring about the absurdity for Rhys's female characters, as they initially and frequently also do for Sartre, and as the possessing classes do for Arthur Phelps by preventing him from attaining 'the human'. For Rhys, though, it is specifically men who freeze women into an object. One is reminded here of Beauvoir's concept of the Other, which is how men

³⁰ *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, p. 115.

³¹ Jean Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark* (London: Constable, 1934; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 77.

³² Jean Rhys, *Quartet* (as *Postures*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1928; repr. as *Quartet*, Deutsch, 1969; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 70.

see women. Another illustration of this is the quotation below, where Sasha sees men as the flaw to women's mindless oneness:

As soon as you have reached this heaven of indifference, you are pulled out of it. From your heaven you have to go back to hell. When you are dead to the world, the world often rescues you, if only to make a figure of fun out of you.³³

The word 'rescues' is ironic, of course, as Sasha does not want to be 'rescued' by others — she finds it unfortunate that the world should intrude upon her mental anaesthesia. The hell of the existence of (male) others reflects an inability on the part of Rhys's women to transcend their situation: others turn them into objects, which Beauvoir would of course agree with.

There is a very different example of the objectification process — and of *mauvaise foi* at the same time — in a conversation between two characters in the café Camille in *La Nausée*, when Docteur Rogé (an example of one of Sartre's self-important scum) greets one of the customers, the pathetic Monsieur Achille, as an 'old nutter'.³⁴ Achille's healer has arrived, and, thus classified by the doctor, he feels invulnerable, as his name — the French for Achilles, of course — almost suggests; he has only to act out his ascribed role in order to free himself from absurdity and, the reader imagines, the horrors of the Nausea. Monsieur Achille believes he has found his essence, and the narrator comments: 'And there we have it: the other smiles with humility. An old nutter: he relaxes, he feels protected from himself: nothing will happen to him today.' The self-deceived cures the self-deceived. 'Inauthentic' self-definition here inevitably depends on others, and this is an excellent example of alienation, although the object of attention evidently does not

³³ *Good Morning, Midnight*, p. 76.

³⁴ *La Nausée*, p. 99.

experience it as alienation: for a brief time, it is experienced as freedom from anguish. Rhys's women, on the other hand, are incapable of this kind of *mauvaise foi*.

Rhys was not just an outsider because she was a woman, and moreover a woman from a foreign country. It is impossible to judge to what extent either of these two distancing factors influenced a third source of alienation, but Rhys suffered from another form of colonization: an incapacitating shyness in which the self feels invaded by others. (And it is significant that Arthur Phelps, who also suffers from a milder form of shyness, nevertheless experiences similar sensations of being invaded.) Angier notes the two occasions when Rosamond Lehmann saw Rhys; the first time was when Rhys visited Lehmann, her sister, and Lehmann's friend Violet Hammersley for tea, although such was Rhys's shyness that the three women had great difficulty communicating with her; on the second occasion, Lehmann was invited to Rhys's house, although Rhys was so drunk that she did not recognize her.³⁵ In *Good Morning, Midnight* in particular, Rhys gives a vivid account of the problem. It is only possible for Sasha to speak fluent French, for instance, when she has had a drink or when she knows and likes a person. In one episode, just as Sasha is being dismissed from employment by Mr Blank, the language used and the mood shown very closely resemble one of Britton's silent howls. These are thoughts in retrospect:

So you have the right to pay me four hundred francs a month, to lodge me in a small, dark room, to clothe me shabbily, to harass me with worry and monotony and unsatisfied longings till you get me to the point when I blush at a look, cry at a word. [...] Let's say that you have this mystical right to cut my legs off. But the right to ridicule me afterwards because I am a cripple — no, that I think you haven't got. And that's the right you hold most dearly, isn't it? You must be able to despise the people you exploit. [...] Did I say all this? Of course I didn't. I didn't even think it.³⁶

³⁵ *Jean Rhys*, p. 336–38.

³⁶ *Good Morning, Midnight*, pp. 25–26.

But Sasha *felt* the absurdity, which is similar to that which Arthur Phelps experiences, where he is given starvation wages and is then criticized for looking like a scarecrow. Both Phelps and Sasha are mentally crippled in several ways.

Unlike Roquentin, the protagonist in *La Nausée* who at the end of the novel appears at least to be moving a little towards 'authentic' self-definition, there is no escape route for Sasha. For Rhys's female characters, the *mauvaise foi* of the nostalgic feelings of childhood or the deadening sensations of alcohol can provide a temporary reprieve from the horrors of the existence of others, but there is nevertheless very little place for even 'inauthentic' self-definition in the world of Rhys's women.

Sartre gives a well-known example of *mauvaise foi* which is of relevance to Rhys's characters. It concerns a young woman who has just met a man who is attracted to her. After some deliberation, she decides to allow him to take her hand, although she divorces her mind from her body: 'the hand lies motionless in her partner's warm hands: neither consenting nor resisting — a thing'; she has retreated into her mind, looking at her body 'from on high as though it were a passive object to which things can *happen*, but which can neither cause nor avoid them, because everything is external to it.'³⁷ Rhys's protagonists — and Anna Morgan in *Voyage in the Dark* in particular — behave very much like this, objectifying their bodies, believing against all evidence that the man loves them. In *Le Deuxième sexe*, Beauvoir says that husbands give their wives 'no direct grip on the future or the world' because the husband is the social mediator.³⁸ Such is the case with Rhys's kept women, who only accomplish their fleeting freedom through men, and even that is difficult to obtain, as Anna discovers: 'I was so nervous about how I looked that three-

³⁷ *L'Être et le néant*, pp. 90, 91.

³⁸ *Le Deuxième sexe*, II, 16.

quarters of me was in a prison, wandering round and round in a circle. If he had said that I looked all right or that I was pretty, it would have set me free.’³⁹

Nevertheless, Rhys’s alienated women certainly make gestures of protest against their position, and attempt to transcend the moment by becoming subjects defining themselves, notably when Anna stabs a lighted cigarette into Walter’s hand, or when Julia contemptuously brushes a glove across Mr Mackenzie’s cheek. But these isolated incidents, because relatively rare, serve to reinforce the strangeness of them. There is little room for transcendence in Rhys’s fiction, which substantiates Beauvoir’s belief that transcendence is very difficult for women, although by no means impossible. Rather, though, Rhys’s female characters run away from life, such as Sasha above, or Julia Martin, whom Mr Mackenzie sees as ‘Afraid of life. Had to screw herself up to it all the time.’⁴⁰ In the end, the flight is into the self. On the first page of *Good Morning, Midnight*, Sasha describes the street where she lives as ending in a flight of steps: ‘What they call an impasse.’⁴¹ Sasha, like Rhys herself, has arrived at an impasse. With Rhys’s female characters, there is a hiatus between the interior and the exterior worlds. Her novels are full of the meaningless of existence, reaching a kind of zenith of absurdity with *Good Morning, Midnight*, and it was almost three decades before she would publish another book.

Feelings of absurdity and *mauvaise foi* pervade the literature of alienation, although the release of transcendence is present towards the end of Winifred Holtby’s *The Crowded Street* (1924), one of several of her spinster novels. Here, the problem is not so much men — nor, perhaps, even the lack of them after the war had killed so many — but the stranglehold of the family, specifically Muriel’s mother, who keeps her in a psychological

³⁹ *Voyage in the Dark*, p. 66.

⁴⁰ *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, p. 19.

⁴¹ *Good Morning, Midnight*, p. 9.

and physical prison.⁴² Holtby's protagonists inhabit a very different world from Rhys's, and Muriel oozes *mauvaise foi*, constantly having to invent obligations in order to prevent her from expressing her freedom. In her Introduction to *The Crowded Street*, Claire Hardisty says that after World War I, 'There was an assumption that an unmarried daughter should stay at home and help her mother.'⁴³ Jean E. Kennard sums up that kind of life, which is Muriel's situation for most of the novel: 'Muriel spends her time waiting, waiting to be asked to play tennis, to go for a walk at a picnic, to dance, to get married. Life is a party to which she must wait to be invited; she takes no initiative.'⁴⁴ The narrator is evidently in agreement, and speaks, for instance, of 'A queer self-possession [*sic*] alien to her nature', and Muriel herself realizes long before the end of the book that she has 'sacrificed her intellect to her mother's need'.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, up to the end of the book Muriel lives her life through others, is unable to move without others moving before her. She is self-effacing to the point of absurdity. Devoted to the exotic Clare Duquesne as an adolescent, she tells herself, 'Oh, I would die for her [...] Oh God, if you've planned anything awful to happen to Clare, let it happen to me instead.'⁴⁶ Some time later, Muriel says of herself and many others in her predicament: 'suddenly we find ourselves left alone in a dull crowded street with no one caring and our lives unneeded, and all the fine things that we meant to do, like toys that a child has laid aside'.⁴⁷ (There is a vague echo of Rhys's ontology in this.)

⁴² Winifred Holtby, *The Crowded Street* (London: John Lane at the Bodley Head, 1924; repr. Virago Press, 1981).

⁴³ Claire Hardisty, Introduction, *The Crowded Street*, p. xi.

⁴⁴ Jean E. Kennard, *Vera Britain & Winifred Holtby* (Hanover: The University Press of New England, c. 1989), p. 63.

⁴⁵ *The Crowded Street*, pp. 116, 141.

⁴⁶ *The Crowded Street*, p. 34.

⁴⁷ *The Crowded Street*, p. 232.

Holtby's image of the crowded street reminds us of Roquentin's sensations of being *de trop*, abandoned in a contingent world devoid of meaning, absurd. (And an echo of this feeling is given below when the narrator of *Hunger and Love* attacks the business world in the longest sentence in the novel.) Like Monsieur Achille, Muriel waits for another to come along and create a semblance of the essence that she is incapable of authentically creating herself. In places, her friend Delia (modelled to some extent on Vera Brittain) acts not so much as Muriel's alter ego but as the only ego they have. She has a greater insight into Muriel's alienation than Muriel herself, a perfect understanding of her *mauvaise foi*, and of her need for transcendence. Delia has resolved to go to Cambridge University, and believes that if Muriel wants to go to college too she should 'go and do it': 'Asking permission is a coward's way of shifting responsibility on to some one else. [...]' It's only a sort of disguise for the futility of life here'; Muriel's lame but revealing reply is that 'some of us can't choose. We have to take life as it comes.'⁴⁸ Delia's word 'responsibility' is straight out of Sartre's vocabulary, although perhaps some years before he actually used it in print, and it is significant that she also speaks of 'futility' and uses Sartre's word 'coward' in the same context of *mauvaise foi*. Sartre's work also concerns such choices that Muriel fails to recognise as her own because she sees her life as determined by others.

Towards the end of the book, Delia again confronts Muriel with her situation and her *mauvaise foi*. And again, the words have a strong Sartrean resonance:

Your life is your own, Muriel, nobody can take it from you. You may choose to look after your mother; you may choose to pursue a so-called career, or you may choose to marry. You may

⁴⁸ *The Crowded Street*, pp. 86–8.

choose right and you may choose wrong. But the thing that matters is to take your life into your own hands and live it, accepting responsibility for failure or success.⁴⁹

Choice, of course, involves apprehending consciousness and transcending ourselves. Revealingly, Sartre speaks about a choice a student of his had asked him about, concerning staying with his mother or joining the *Forces Françaises Libres*: the parallel is interesting as Sartre and Holtby are again using very similar ideas about freedom. Delia obviously does not use the word 'transcendence', but this is what she is talking about, and this is eventually what she decides upon. Unlike Rhys's female characters, enmeshed in absurdity with no hope of escape from their alienated worlds, Muriel at last projects herself into the world towards a future Britton would understand, and it is significant that Holtby wrote favourably of his work in *Time and Tide*, as noted in Chapter 1.

The Crowded Street is divided into five sections, the final one of which is entitled 'Muriel' because she has finally overcome her *mauvaise foi* and has begun to live an authentic existence. She lives in a flat with Delia, and she turns down an offer of marriage to Godfrey, with whom she has been silently in love for many years. She tells him, 'The thing that matters is to take your life into your hands and live it, following the highest vision as you see it. If I married you, I'd simply be following the expedient promptings of my mother and my upbringing.'⁵⁰ Vital to this thinking, of course, is the fact that Muriel is moving into transcendence: there are no longer any deterministic excuses in her words. She is learning to be her own person. Kennard says that Brittain's *The Dark Tide* (1923), like *The Crowded Street*, 'traces the progress of its female protagonist towards self-definition and empowerment'.⁵¹ This appears to be an excellent example of essence. Muriel has at

⁴⁹ *The Crowded Street*, p. 232.

⁵⁰ *The Crowded Street*, p. 270.

⁵¹ *Vera Brittain & Winifred Holtby*, p. 58.

last overcome the absurdity of contingency, and above all the enticements of *mauvaise foi* that a married life offers, in favour of self-creation.

I have explained how Rhys's work is concerned with men dominating women and Holtby's is often about the spinster's problems with self-definition. And I have also briefly mentioned *Le Deuxième sexe* in relation to the Other; this book very much concerns woman as man's Other, although by extension, from the beginning of the book Beauvoir is eager to express similarities between the situation of women and blacks in particular, with whom she sees 'profound analogies'.⁵² She believes that women belong to a separate 'caste', and there are similar ideas in Anand's work.

Anand came from the privileged warrior caste, although his work shows great sympathy with disadvantaged members of Indian society. Krishna Nandan Sinha says in his short study of Anand that his earliest books 'not only present a mirror reflection of the actual life lived by the less fortunate, the lowly, and the disinherited, but move us also to the catharsis of pity'.⁵³ Of particular note, and of specific interest here because they were all written during the inter-war period, are Anand's first three novels: *Untouchable* (1935), *The Coolie* (1936) and *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937).⁵⁴

There are certainly parallels between Anand's characters and Arthur Phelps. In *Untouchable*, Anand's protagonist, Bakha, is a latrine and street cleaner and an outsider *par excellence*. In a country already colonized by the British, he is forced to suffer an extra layer of colonization, although the second is inflicted on him by his own people. As Gandhi (a representation of the Indian leader) says in the novel: 'while we are asking for

⁵² *Le Deuxième sexe*, I, 27.

⁵³ Krishna Nandan Sinha, *Mulk Raj Anand*, Twayne's World Authors Series, 232 (New York: Twayne, 1972), p. 27.

⁵⁴ Mulk Raj Anand, *Untouchable* (London: Wishart, 1935; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1940); Mulk Raj Anand, *The Coolie* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1936; repr. as *Coolie*, May Fair Books, 1962); Mulk Raj Anand, *Two Leaves and a Bud* (Lawrence & Wishart, 1937; repr. New York: Liberty Press, 1954).

freedom from the grip of a foreign nation, we have ourselves, for centuries, trampled underfoot millions of human beings without feeling the slightest remorse for our iniquity'.⁵⁵ The subject of Bakha's work was almost untouchable as the theme of this very angry novel, and it met with similar anger to that of *Hunger and Love*. In his Introduction to the book, E. M. Forster states that 'No European, however sympathetic, could have created the character of Bakha, because he would not have known enough about his troubles'.⁵⁶ By a similar argument, of course, it could be said that no member of the middle classes could have written *Hunger and Love* because it comes from someone with an insider's knowledge of the bottom rungs of working-class life. Not only is the filth of Arthur's world in some ways similar, but the absurdity of Bakha's world is similar too — both are incapable of changing their situation, although Bakha's is evidently much worse, and the narrator of *Untouchable* speaks of 'the sub-human status to which [Bakha] was condemned from birth'.⁵⁷ He is an excellent example of a victim of Sartre's 'look': because of the misfortune of his lowly birth, he is turned into an object wherever he goes. Being an untouchable, he is not allowed to draw water directly from the well, he must announce his presence as he passes people in the street so that those of a higher caste can escape 'contamination' by being touched by him, and shopkeepers 'purify' the money he leaves on a special area of the counter by sprinkling it with water. The narrator speaks of Bakha as 'lifted from the gutter, through the barriers of space, to partake of a life which was his, and yet not his'.⁵⁸ Interestingly, the word 'alienate' is specifically used, and in a political context, towards the end of the novel, when Anand's character Gandhi gives a

⁵⁵ *Untouchable*, p. 146.

⁵⁶ *Untouchable*, p. vi.

⁵⁷ *Untouchable*, p. 20.

⁵⁸ *Untouchable*, pp. 137–38.

speech against the horrors of untouchability and says ‘the government tried to alienate [the untouchables] from Hinduism by giving them a separate legal and political status’.⁵⁹

Bakha fantasizes about explaining to Gandhi about being beaten for touching someone of ‘superiority’. And then the narrator’s voice changes, moving from an objective position to a subjective one: the voice, in sympathy with Bakha, shifts from the expected ‘he’ to ‘me’ as he imagines an egalitarian world:

He imagined himself rising on the platform, when all was still and the meeting had begun, and telling the Mahatma that a man from the city, where he had come to remove untouchability, had abused him for accidentally touching him and had also beaten him. Then the Mahatma would chastise that man perhaps, or, at least, he would chide the citizens here, and they won’t treat me again as they did this morning.⁶⁰

The use of ‘me’ avoids any possible confusion about the person being referred to, in this case Bakha as opposed to Gandhi, although it could of course easily have been avoided simply by using ‘Bakha’. Clearly, though, the shift in tense from ‘would’ to ‘won’t’ is also intended to represent something more: by changing from the hypothetical conditional tense to the more definite future tense, the narrator is sympathizing with Bakha, merging Bakha’s voice of hope with his own, and in so doing is intensifying the text’s criticism of the established order. The technique is very similar to that used by Britton in the incident quoted in the previous chapter — and which I shall again quote further on in this chapter — where the narrator’s voice merges with Miss Whyman’s when they look into each others’ eyes. The significance of this to atheistic existentialism is evident: whereas the ‘he’ represents the distanced,

⁵⁹ *Untouchable*, p. 146.

⁶⁰ *Untouchable*, p. 142.

objectified Bakha whom all the insiders within the caste system treat as a thing, the 'me' represents a fantasy world in which Bakha and others in his situation can become authentic individuals, where they are subjects. In other words, as with Sartre's intention with existentialism, it would join the mind to the body, and so make them one.

But Anand's next two novels do not share the optimism of *Untouchable*. *Coolie*, like *Two Leaves and a Bud*, is much more pessimistic than *Untouchable*, and the many absurdities in the novel are again based on the work situation of the poor. Fifteen-year-old Munoo slaves in a pickle factory, and is then forced to eke out a living on the streets. In the end, he dies from tuberculosis, a victim of a rapacious and destructive society. I mention more about class and *mauvaise foi* below when speaking of Britton, but it is significant that the liars — to others and to themselves — are less prominent in Anand's first two books. Rather, they exist in force in *Two Leaves and a Bud*. In this, 'the most bitter' of his novels according to Anand himself, the silent outsider howl is similar to that of Arthur Phelps, such as when Gangu restrains himself from telling Kanoo Mal that business is 'theft and robbery'.⁶¹ For the first time in a novel by Anand, the reader sees life more from the point of view of the middle class, as the book alternates between scenes of tea workers who are virtual slaves, and scenes with middle-class individuals, mainly their bosses. And the bosses, Sartre's 'important' ones, are overwhelmingly in *mauvaise foi*. Of the manager of the tea plantation, the mocking narrator says: 'Of course, Croft-Cooke, like many of his mark, rather exaggerated the difficulties of his position, [...] mixing reality with romance so as to become almost a legend to his hearers', and 'It would appear that he was almost the pivot of the universe around whom all the constellations revolved.'⁶² John de la Havre, the doctor at the plantation, is the only member of the middle class who has any sympathy

⁶¹ Mulk Raj Anand, p. 36; *Two Leaves and a Bud*, p. 70.

⁶² *Two Leaves and a Bud*, p. 82.

with the workers, and Margaret, who is the daughter of Croft–Cooke and his lover, is deaf to his words of anger at the plight of the tea workers. Croft–Cooke’s wife Barbara is also in *mauvaise foi*, preferring to retreat into self-justifying thoughts, as in: ‘It was no good to spoil your whole life worrying about the injustice of other people’s lot, and to make oneself miserable all the time.’⁶³ While these are certainly examples of *mauvaise foi*, they are nevertheless of a very different order to each other: such is the self-importance of Croft–Cooke that he appears to believe that he is invested with god-like qualities, but Margaret’s *mauvaise foi*, although still driven by hedonism, takes the form of blinding herself to the appalling health conditions, rape, and other brutalities that the workers suffer on the plantation at the hands of their masters. Perhaps, following Sartre’s model, we could call Croft–Cooke ‘scum’ and his wife a ‘coward’.

All of Anand’s working-class characters in his first three novels seem to be imprisoned in the circumstances of their birth. But another minority group to feature prominently, although covertly, in inter-war fiction, was trapped in its own sexuality. Homosexuals were a less obvious minority group than others, partly because of the illegality of the practice and the consequent clandestineness of their sexual identity. And partly for this reason, homosexual writers are interesting as a study in *mauvaise foi* due to the strategies they use both to express and to conceal their characters’ sexual identity. John Hampson’s novels all concern homosexuality as a central theme, although the real nature of this theme is only expressed obliquely. In *Strip Jack Naked* (1934), for instance, homosexuality is expressed as difference.⁶⁴ Of two brothers, the younger Ted is a ‘proper little mother, aren’t you, ducky?’ according to the elder Alf, who also says of him: ‘As for girls! The very mention of them upsets him.’⁶⁵ (Of course, these signifiers seem much more obvious today than

⁶³ *Two Leaves and a Bud*, p. 90.

⁶⁴ John Hampson, *Strip Jack Naked* (London: Heinemann, 1934).

⁶⁵ *Strip Jack Naked*, pp. 38, 43.

then.) On the death of his brother, though, Ted offers to marry his brother's pregnant lover, and the resulting marriage proves to be a sound — if not a resounding — success. Hampson was not the only writer playing similar gender games around this time, because the homosexual Rhys Davies also played with sexual difference. And because he did so in greater depth, I examine two of his novels below in considerably more detail.

In his essay on Davies, 'The Memory of Lost Countries', Tony Brown makes an important point when he says:

[N]ot only has Wales been for centuries distant from the centres of political and cultural power, but the Welsh writer in English is of course doubly marginalized in that s/he, though not English, is at the same time, if not Welsh-speaking, shut out from the rich cultural heritage in the Welsh language.⁶⁶

(The expression 'shut out' is also the expression that Arthur Phelps uses for his feelings of alienation.) Davies, on the other hand, was not only 'doubly marginalized', but his sexuality also makes him an outsider. Born in a coal-mining village in South Wales, he left the strong macho environment almost as soon as he could. In London he could show his difference with impunity, for example, by wearing spats and a malacca stick, after which he named one of the chapters in *Print of a Hare's Foot*. Like Davies's own persona, his main characters too escape from direct representations of homosexuality by assuming identities which express an ambiguous Otherness. The novels I deal with here are Davies's first two, *The Withered Root* (1927) and *Rings on her Fingers* (1930).⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Tony Brown, "'The Memory of Lost Countries': Rhys Davies's Wales", in *Rhys Davies: Decoding the Hare: Critical Essays to Mark the Centenary of the Writer's Birth*, ed. by Meic Stephens (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), pp. 71–86 (pp. 71–72).

⁶⁷ Rhys Davies, *The Withered Root* (London: Holden, 1927); Rhys Davies, *Rings on her Fingers* (London: Shaylor, 1930).

In *The Withered Root*, Reuben Daniels's difference is expressed in part by his 'feminine' qualities, as when his father Hugh says, 'different to most boys he is. Delicate seems his mind.'⁶⁸ Furthermore, he lacks the ability to join with others of his age in the usual adolescent, heterosexual pursuits:

[S]ome odd streak in his nature prevented him being intimate with the other youths of the district; the few times he had accompanied the boys of the street in their horse-play or amorous expeditions he had been a silent and brooding witness always apart. [...] He knew there was something wrong with him, that he was not as they.⁶⁹

Again, this has a vague hint of Arthur Phelps looking on as an outsider allowing life to pass him by, although Reuben's sexual reactions are very different. Certainly, he is both attracted and repulsed by the beautiful and sexually rapacious Eirwen, and the language used during their early unconsummated relationship is vivid: 'Her arms tightened like snakes about his body; he was held in the tentacles of her physical vigour as a drowning man in the supple arms of an octopus. He began to squirm for breath.'⁷⁰ The very physical Eirwen is strongly contrasted to the spiritual Reuben, who spends much of the book with the religious revivalists, the Corinthians. Much like the early twentieth-century preacher Evan Roberts on whom he is modelled, Reuben becomes a celebrity throughout Wales.

This behaviour is an escape, of course, which Sartre would have seen as *mauvaise foi* because Reuben is indulging in, and indeed actively encouraging, a ritual which is in effect displaced sexual energy, as the narrator suggests several times. When Reuben takes the hand of a convert, 'Her eyes were closed, her mouth worked foamingly and still her body writhed as though she were in an orgasm of pleasure', and Catherine Pritchards, who later

⁶⁸ *The Withered Root*, p. 23.

⁶⁹ *The Withered Root*, p. 26.

⁷⁰ *The Withered Root*, p. 79.

tries to seduce Reuben, takes his hand — ostensibly in spiritual congress with him, although what she experiences is ‘a further orgasm of emotion’.⁷¹ Much later, Reuben remembers the words of Philip — a character to some extent modelled on D. H. Lawrence — talking about religious energy in Freudian terms: ‘The desire to yield oneself to the ecstatic power of God is but a sublimation of the desire of the flesh to achieve consummation in the flesh of another who stirs our worship.’⁷²

Reuben slowly realizes first of all that his converts are in *mauvaise foi*. Relatively early in the book, he tells Morgans the Bakehouse that ‘[The converts] want to be comforted [...] That’s what they want — comfort, and assurance that they will sit in Heaven.’⁷³ And his own *mauvaise foi* is not continuous, as Reuben is intermittently plagued by an intense sexual frustration that appears to validate Philip’s words: ‘He remembered how sometimes in his most exalted visions a certain flame of desire leapt with searing and blinding force within him, and he would see within stretches of dark night the naked white bodies of women.’⁷⁴ And sometimes, Reuben is thrust back into the absurdity of existence. One is reminded of Sartre’s vision of the nothingness of contingency and the look of objectifying others analysed in *L’Être et le néant*; and along with the Sartrean imagery, there is a Daliesque suggestion in the language here: ‘sometimes a black wave of nausea surged up through that consciousness, and the faces seemed to congeal into one solid mass of greasy white flesh, flesh animated by a thousand watching eyes’.⁷⁵ It is when a child is trampled to death before the beginning of a Corinthian meeting that an anguished Reuben finally acknowledges his own *mauvaise foi*: ‘It seemed to him that sheaths of worn and stale

⁷¹ *The Withered Root*, pp. 148–49, 157.

⁷² *The Withered Root*, p. 213.

⁷³ *The Withered Root*, p. 179.

⁷⁴ *The Withered Root*, p. 190.

⁷⁵ *L’Être et le néant*, pp. 292–341; *The Withered Root*, p. 202.

deceits were falling from his soul, dank and decrepit cerements falling from the awakening consciousness of his soul.’⁷⁶ Reuben has already seen the Corinthians as a ‘circus’, and he promptly leaves the group.

It is significant that after Reuben’s eventual relationship with Eirwen ends, his consequent flight following her rejection of him leads to a series of events which culminates in his death: their relationship drives much of the narrative both directly and indirectly, and it would be difficult to see the novel proceeding further without its existence. It might also be suggested that Eirwen and Reuben represent two facets of the same person, and that Davies is (here unsuccessfully) trying to unite them. The two main characters in *Rings on her Fingers* both share some characteristics with Eirwen and Reuben, and J. Lawrence Mitchell introduces a similar idea about Davies uniting two opposites when he says that the novel is ‘a way to reconcile two very different aspects of his own complex androgynous psyche.’⁷⁷ The two main characters, Edith and Edgar Roberts, can in fact neither live with nor without each other; but from a Sartrean point of view, there is a very tenuous suggestion in *Rings on her Fingers* of a resolution of psychological conflict. By the end of the novel, the two characters have at least begun to move a little way towards an authentic existence.

In the novel, Edgar inherits a flourishing draper’s business from his father. To many people, though, he is more a figure of ridicule than respect in the small town: he has ‘a certain delicacy, verging on the feminine’, dresses — like Davies himself — in spats and carries a malacca stick, and introduces powder puff and scents into the store, where he is seldom in the flannel department; it is even jokingly suggested, when he is taking part in an amateur production of *Romeo and Juliet*, that the nurse would be a suitable role for

⁷⁶ *The Withered Root*, p. 234.

⁷⁷ J. Lawrence Mitchell, “‘I Wish I Had a Trumpet’: Rhys Davies and the Creative Impulse’, in *Rhys Davies: Decoding the Hare*, pp. 147–61 (p. 153).

him.⁷⁸ Modelled in part on Emma Bovary, Edith adopts a dominant position from the beginning of their relationship by making Edgar wait a relatively long time before accepting his marriage proposal; technically, the marriage in the beginning is a disaster for her, and she feels frustrated and yearns for adventure, preferably far from Wales. Edith's central problem is that her marriage has freed her economically but not existentially, although her Lawrentian friend Raglan is wrong when he tells her before the wedding that she is deceiving herself.

Edith is not in *mauvaise foi*: on the contrary, she strives for transcendence although her life is filled with a vague absurdity: 'she was aware of something ominous in that hollow of her being, a gloom, a profundity, an abyss — of what? Hate?', and considers conventional contemporary marriage 'sticky' and 'unreal'.⁷⁹ From an existential point of view, the words 'sticky' and 'unreal' are revealing because stickiness is one of the key elements of Roquentin's sensations of the Nausea, and Edith's life is unreal because she is not living it authentically, merely through her husband. She feels no space for transcendence, and is trapped in a meaningless charade, 'the wife [...] bottled up in the husband's existence', as she calls it.⁸⁰ This of course is exactly what Beauvoir is talking about when she speaks about the problems the married woman has. Ironically, it is more the making point than the breaking point of the marriage when Edith confesses to her husband that she has just had sexual relations with a complete stranger. It is time for Edgar to learn the truth about his wife and learn to dispense with his *mauvaise foi*, the main attribute she hates about her husband being his unwavering devotion to and worship of her. Traditional marriage is impossible for Edith: 'Such a bliss is possible, I admit, but to me it

⁷⁸ *Rings on her Fingers*, p. 93, 70.

⁷⁹ *Rings on her Fingers*, pp. 125, 221.

⁸⁰ *Rings on her Fingers*, p. 208.

would be a burial.’⁸¹ Now that Edgar is no longer blinkered by *mauvaise foi*, Edith believes that they will be able to move into a more authentic future:

I am nearer to you now than ever I’ve been. I’m nearer to you because at last I’ve shattered your ridiculous romantic worship of me. Last night and to-day we’ve met for the first time in reality. It has not been pleasant and we’re both raw from the encounter.⁸²

There are a few other things to note about *Rings on her Fingers*, mainly about the nature of modern life, although in general they are more relevant to my next chapter.

Also relevant to both the present chapter and the next one is Rhys Davies’s *My Wales* (1937), and in particular an incident, also mentioned by Tony Brown, that took place when Rhys was making a train journey through Wales, which also shows the influence of Lawrence on him. The story seems a little contrived, almost fictional, as though Davies were constructing an ideal in order to meld, for instance, the ultimately irreconcilable problems in *Rings on her Fingers*. Opposite Davies in the carriage at the beginning of the anecdote is an American, who initially appears to be acutely alert to his surroundings. But when another passenger gets on at Brecon and sits next to him, the American is seen from another perspective. Davies calls the newcomer a ‘Silurian’, someone with atavistic or residual pre-Celtic traits. The American now appears to be ‘living outside himself’, ‘using his mind and storing information away in it, like a card-index’, and Davies becomes ‘aware only of a tirelessly eager voice emerging from a collection of grey cells’.⁸³ The Silurian, however, represents a very different kind of person:

⁸¹ *Rings on her Fingers*, p. 221.

⁸² *Rings on her Fingers*, p. 222.

⁸³ Rhys Davies, *My Wales* (London: Jarrolds, 1937), pp. 21–22.

Odd how the Silurian, who, it appeared later, knew little of his country's history, looked of the two the richer in knowledge. Perhaps because he *was* those mountain heights, those strong fought-over castles, those antique churches, even the cromlechs. He had no need of mental details about them.

The American may be very alert, using his intelligence to thrust himself into the world, but his problem is that he is all transcendence, his mind never fully in tune with his body, incapable of unity. The Silurian, however, has a much deeper understanding than intelligence can bring: he has an innate knowledge, both mental and physical, of his environment, giving him an inner peace that incorporates the past, even back to the prehistoric era of the cromlechs. Sartre, of course, would call this *mauvaise foi* on the part of Davies, and say that he is constructing a genetic or cultural determinism for the Silurians. But it would not be an exaggeration to say that Davies's construction of the Silurian is a perfect synthesis of transcendence and immanence, the very qualities represented respectively in the tortured Edith and Edgar. But, again, the implications of this episode too belong to the next chapter.

I have already analysed atheistic existentialism in relation to works of Rhys, Holtby, Anand and Davies. I now conclude this chapter by analysing Britton's construction of alienation. In the previous chapter, I illustrated various ways in which different literary outsiders appropriated modernist techniques in their writing. The chapter almost exclusively concerned working-class fiction, in which the characters are frequently alienated by their work, particularly when *at* work. But I mentioned that some aspects of outsider modernism as manifested in working-class literature — some of James Barke's and John Sommerfield's works, for instance — are actually a celebration of the working classes. The working classes may be alienated from the rest of society, perhaps almost by definition, but this alienation is not necessarily a permanent state: they often find a sense of community in political, familial or general social situations. Much working-class fiction

shows communities working together, often in political solidarity, although there is very little suggestion of common ground in *Hunger and Love*. In this respect, Britton has much more in common with James Hanley's characters, about whom Ian Haywood notes:

In Hanley's fiction the male hero is essentially emasculated by his class position. The consciousness of this disenfranchisement finds expression in existential yearnings, psychic agonies, and frequent eruptions of violent emotions and actions. There is no solace in either the stability of a close-knit community or the liberating potential of collective action. The social character of the working class is fatally invaded by fragmentation and alienation.⁸⁴

In *Hunger and Love*, the narrator's comments frequently reveal Arthur's alienation: 'you have a distinct sense of being shut out. Your job is to earn his living, but not to know. Not to know anything at all' (p. 295). Phelps, then, does not work to earn his own living, but that of his boss: evidently, Tressell would have recognized a philanthropist. A very important function of the ruling class, according to the narrator of *Hunger and Love*, is to ensure that the working classes do not receive enough education to understand this. The essential difference between the plight of Muriel Hammond and Arthur Phelps as outsiders is that the main obstructions to Phelps's intellectual maturity are his employers and society in general as opposed to the family. Arthur Phelps feels socially and sexually alienated. He lives in an absurd world created by the ruling class, and throughout the book there are many comments on his resentment of this absurdity: 'The rich men's sons — they are the lucky ones: they, with their chance in life' (p. 27). Arthur is socially excluded, and there are frequently expressed remarks about his being shut out:

See that fine house there? The door is locked. See those lovely grounds? — aren't they beautifully kept? The gate is locked. Here's King's College, in the Strand, learning — there's a

⁸⁴ *Working-Class Fiction*, p. 77.

commissionaire at the entrance; you can't go in. Books in the shop-window, learning: got any money, Arthur? Look out, my boy, there's a copper coming! (p. 30).

The above quotation sums up Arthur's problems, which are those of the working-class outsider. His class excludes him from the bourgeois world of material possessions and higher education, his poor wages exclude him from the self-education he would ideally like, and the police are always present.

In working-class literature, the absurd is often viewed as a function of the class structure. Much of Britton's alienation derives from politics and his position vis-à-vis society. In 1925 he wrote a letter to the *Times* protesting that voting in the municipal elections was too difficult for 'the unleisured man' both because of the intricacies of registration and because of his difficulty in finding time to go to the polling station. He warns the readers:

[T]hose who are sufficiently active-minded to submit to this inconvenience tend more and more to become Socialist in spirit as the feeling grows that obstacles are purposely placed in their way by the parties who have hitherto been solely responsible for the conditions and extent of their political freedom.⁸⁵

Arthur feels as though everyone is watching him, which relates to Sartre's 'look'. Adrift in an insane world, forced to do meaningless work throughout the book, he has no real friends, and his contact with others — with his fellow workers, bosses, prostitutes and the like — is almost entirely on a perfunctory level. The image his employers have of him is essentially as an object. There is an obvious link here between the way men treat Rhys's characters as objects, and the way Holtby's Muriel turns herself into an object. Phelps's employers have a constant eye on him to ensure that he is being a dutiful wage-slave, and the police watch him for possible criminal intentions. He transcends the absurdity by

⁸⁵ Lionel Britton, 'Municipal Elections', *Times*, 10 January 1925, p. 8.

taking a book outside on his Sundays off: 'Out all day in the sun, free from the spying meanness of authority' (p. 47).

But there is an important difference between Arthur and most of the main characters created by the other writers above: in Sartrean fashion, Arthur not only refuses to accept the objectification, but turns it on the others: he objectifies those in authority — particularly his objects of ridicule — Baldwin with his pipe, and Chamberlain with his eye-glass, for example. Even 'natural' (that is to say, left-wing) allies he simply calls 'the anarchist' and 'rabbit-nose'. This is his response to the alienation caused when an individual's freedom is 'taken over and controlled by the Other'.⁸⁶

As Britton elaborated the TS he made frequent changes to the names of his characters, one of whom was Mr Boulter. He became Mr Skillick, the new name containing the words 'kill' and 'sick', as well, almost, as both 'skill' and 'lick'. 'Kill' and 'sick' obviously refer to a callous, violent society Britton believed the world of business represented, and 'lick' to the amount of kowtowing to one's superiors needed to become a shop manager. Clearly, Britton the outsider is polishing his anger by reinforcing his outsider status. After the disaster of being discovered by Skillick in the toilet with Miss Wyman in the 'Love in the Lavatory' chapter, Phelps's mind is in turmoil. The narrator, however, sees his reaction as entirely natural, and turns the sexual morality of the 1930s on its head: Phelps is not dirty-minded for having sexual thoughts about Miss Wyman, it is Skillick who is dirty-minded to think that a natural feeling is dirty. After this incident, the narrator says, 'But nothing happened. The structure of society was solidly set. Trade went on. You shoved sack on back and went out to fill it with book units consisting of so many aggregations of profit' (p. 124). But if the outside world continues as normal, what Arthur feels inside is far from normal, and the narrator conveys his anger in a startling manner. In two hundred and

⁸⁶ Kenneth and Margaret Thompson, *Sartre: Life and Words* (New York: Facts on File, c. 1984), p. 128.

thirty-nine words, the narrator unleashes the longest sentence in the book, which certainly needs to be quoted in full because it is an impressive, and highly idiosyncratic, expression of the rage of the outsider:

Profit for publishers, profit for printers, profit for paper-makers, bookbinders, ink manufacturers, machinery manufacturers, thread manufacturers, 'cloth' manufacturers, cotton planters who supplied raw material for thread and 'linen,' landowners who owned land on which it grew, shippers merchants railway companies who carried and distributed it, size makers quarry owners clay for paper, colliery proprietors coal merchants coal to run the machinery, more planters oil in the ink, more machinery manufacturers crushing machinery for squeezing out oil, more land-owners for planters to pay rent to, more railway companies merchants shippers transport oil to ink manufacturers, more landowners owned land grew wood for shops furniture buildings, merchants who supplied it, carpenters cabinet-makers builders tailors butchers shoemakers grocers built buildings supplied clothes food for workmen managers directors shareholders of all these firms, landowners landlords who owned land buildings on which in which all these people lived, doctors tended them, chemists supplied medicines doctors ordered, bottle glass manufacturers something put medicines in, their landlords landowners, lawyers drew up title deeds prove rights of landowners, farmers who grew food for workmen doctors landowners lawyers, railway companies carters who carried it to shopkeepers, royalties to landowner from quarry colliery proprietor, royalties for authors, commission for their agents, rent to their landlords, taxation from whole lot provide jobs pensions show, to make whole thing seem natural, and money for police soldiers guns to bash and murder anybody who couldn't manage see just how natural it is (pp. 124–25).

There are forty-nine more words in the TS than in the FC; the content is almost the same, but Britton later systematically excised almost every definite article, producing a fragmented list and a much more effective passage. The FC is more repetitive, too, as the narrator attempts to echo the monotony of Arthur's working life and the world of trade in general. The book was developing more as an expression of alienation as it went through its various proof states, and this passage is a good reflection of it. This is

obviously a period of heightened emotion for Arthur, and the lack of punctuation highlights the high speed of the thoughts, a stream of anger expressed about a stream of profit that has arrested the development of the natural world. But the commercial world, underpinned by the repressive state machinery, makes concerted and complex attempts to prove that a capitalist economy is entirely natural, and has declared war on all dissenters.

In a sense, an analogy can again be drawn between this scene and the scene in the park in *La Nausée* in which the Nausea grips Roquentin and he feels *de trop*, although in the above sentence the narrator uses the politics of the capitalist economy to turn his horror into contempt. He is showing the absurdity of the abundance of capitalist society. It is the law of nature to fight for survival, but the picture that the narrator paints is far from 'natural', as he ironically points out. The level of the contempt is evident from the nature of the language, which is full of images of the business world: 'book units', 'aggregations of profit', and the repetition of the word 'profit' is a drone of hatred. Phelps's sexual progress has been arrested, but trade goes on. Arthur plays on the fact that he owns nothing, that his employers are trying to take his mind, and this passage is clearly an expression of dispossession.

Arthur Phelps lives in a world of dispossession and its attendant alienation, and 'Getting a mind' is his escape from it. He almost sees it as though it is obtaining a piece of property, and the wherewithal to do this is through books: if he can own nothing else, he can at least be the proprietor of his thoughts. This Sartre understands, because he believes that whatever our position in the world, even if we are slaves, mentally we are still free. Significantly, many of the words in the long sentence are 'land' or a compound noun including it, such as 'landlord' and 'landowner'. The narrator begins with an enumeration of the profiteers divided by commas, later becoming apparently angrier as the lack of punctuation merges the profiteers into specific and then more general collective groups:

‘carpenters cabinet-makers builders tailors butchers shoemakers grocers’,
 ‘workmen managers directors shareholders’. The ‘head-line abbreviation’ Bertrand Russell had spoken about in the Introduction to *Hunger and Love* is emphasized and often manifested by a missing article: ‘taxation from whole lot’ and ‘to make whole thing seem natural’. The word ‘more’ is used five times in three lines in the sentence, giving out a clear message about the abundance of goods or the superfluity of owners, which is reinforced by the number of occasions ‘manufacturer’ or ‘maker’ is used. Division of labour is the issue, and underlying this is of course the desire for nationalization. The operation the narrator describes is at a material level, but the material seeps through to the ontological: the sentence represents a long howl of outsider rage.

It would not be inaccurate to say, then, that the main character in *Hunger and Love* is the outsider. Paradoxically, Arthur’s main escape from alienation, his mental escape, is also the means by which he alienates himself all the more: not only from his own class, but also from his middle-class employers because he is not conforming to the conventional role of unthinking wage slave. He throws Robert Blatchford’s *Merrie England* back at the socialist who lends it to him, for instance, because he finds it too patronizing; any attempt to socialize with Doreen’s father is thwarted by his inability to find playing whist anything more than a waste of time; and his bosses view his attempts to ‘get a mind’ very suspiciously. Phelps is incapable of wholeheartedly joining in with anything because of his inability to communicate or associate with others on even the most basic level.

The ‘Contact’ chapter is a good example of how Phelps colludes with his own alienation, and his reading takes him further away from others (with the exception of dead authors). On his only day off from work, Arthur goes to Wimbledon Common and does what he is very good at: looking at others as an outsider: ‘the males are walking with the females [...] Exchanging their minds, what they have of one’ (p.224). This is the cold, almost scientific view of the outsider — as though of a researcher watching animals at a

zoo, or one of the Mass Observation experiments later in the decade. But there is a major conflict in Arthur: the desire for intellectual stimulation as opposed to the desire for sexual gratification. Arthur is bored with a girl's conversation, and the girl, equally bored with Arthur, invents excuses and leaves him to join others with whom she can communicate more successfully. Here, the narrator reveals the strained relationship Arthur has with the outside world: 'Thank the lord you've got rid of her; cuddlesome young thing too; she looks nice under that bush' (p. 229). This is the point where sex and class clash, and where the working- and the middle-class lifestyles lead Arthur into further alienation. The use of the second person here is interesting, as it has a double distancing affect: Arthur is watching the girl, but the narrator is also watching Arthur watching her. After the first semi-colon, it is impossible to tell if the remarks are Arthur's thoughts, or those of the narrator revealing Arthur's thoughts.

Often, the absurdity of working-class existence is replaced by *mauvaise foi*, although it occurs only to a limited extent in Arthur. A repetition of the passage with Miss Wyman quoted in the previous chapter is enlightening when held under a different lens:

But the blood is going round inside the darkness of your body and your will is no longer under your control, and the outline and boundary of your existence have become vague: here in the shop, in the middle of low and base activities, at the ordering of mean and sordid minds, you have a sense of catching up with the meaning of the world. And you know your shirt is hanging out; and never has been properly clean. And I know you are making a game of me, but I wouldn't care a damn what happened to the earth if only this could keep on forever (p. 42).

This is a clear example of the interior merging with the exterior, or the mind with the body. The application of a Sartrean understanding of this passage gives it a fresh perspective. Sartre would of course refute the statement 'your will is no longer under your control' on the ground that it assumes a psychological determinism: Arthur tells himself that his will is outside his control because he is in *mauvaise foi*, lying to

himself to destroy the anguish of his freedom. The vagueness of the boundaries of Arthur's existence is interesting too. He knows that Miss Wyman is playing games with him, but his *mauvaise foi* causes him to suspend this knowledge in order to adopt a paradoxical viewpoint: he believes he is choosing freedom, making himself a subject, but remains equally aware that Miss Wyman — who is not in *mauvaise foi* because she is merely deceiving Arthur rather than herself too — is choosing him as an object. And no matter how negative Miss Whyman's actions may appear, Sartre would still have seen them in terms of transcendence.

Although this is not an isolated moment of Arthur's *mauvaise foi*, such occurrences are fleeting or equivocal, such as the incident when he receives a rise in pay and pretends (or jokes, it is not entirely clear) that he is middle class, or imagines himself married in a comfortable house. It is perhaps likely that it is the bourgeoisie who are being satirized here by their futile attempts to ensnare Arthur, to lead him into a false belief in his own importance: they want him to be what Sartre considers to be 'scum'. Arthur has thought about his possibilities, but most of them lead to the bourgeois *mauvaise foi* snares that their employees and society at large want him to adopt. But the bourgeoisie are far more in *mauvaise foi* than Arthur. The Marxist writer Philip Henderson wrote a few significant lines about *Hunger and Love* in his article in *The Eleventh Hour* mentioned above in Chapter 3:

Its appearance outraged every bourgeois decency, whose existence depends on pretending that the state of affairs that Britton reveals as a running sore in the social body is non-existent. It is indeed inconvenient for high-minded, cultured people to be reminded so forcibly of the tortured, stunted lives of others in which they so complacently acquiesce, for it is easy enough to be high-minded and cultured on a substantial bank balance.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ 'The Crisis in Twentieth-Century Literature', 12 June 1935, p. 92.

We have already seen some examples of this outrage against *Hunger and Love* in Chapter 1, but it is perhaps the word ‘pretending’ which is of particular interest here. Henderson accepts that the comfortable class is aware of the conditions of great poverty in which the poor live, but says that that class perpetuates the belief that the situation does not exist. If they apprehended it, they would of course be living in a state of anguish, but they prefer to live in *mauvaise foi*, lying to themselves as well as others about the non-existence of the poverty. The people Henderson speaks about consider themselves to be ‘important’, and are quite clearly evading matters such as transcendence and responsibility by taking refuge in *mauvaise foi*.

It is important to distinguish Arthur’s *mauvaise foi* from that of the bourgeoisie, as they are not of the same order or depth, and Arthur is more than likely an occasional ‘coward’ than occasional ‘scum’. Sartre himself saw the significance of *mauvaise foi* and class, as Terry Keefe notes:

Clearly, Roquentin [who is very much modelled on Sartre] believes that self-deception is most characteristic of the middle-classes, and perhaps especially of the élite that governs them, but the focal point of his disapproval is the self-deception rather than the class itself.⁸⁸

Britton’s disapproval certainly has a distinct class bias. His enemies in *mauvaise foi* are members of the middle class or the ruling class who define themselves as bishops, prime ministers, judges or businessmen, objectifying themselves, denying themselves the possibility of transcendence. Gladstone’s collar, Chamberlain’s eyeglass and Baldwin’s pipe are all objectifying characteristics. They are mainly used by newspaper cartoonists, of course, but they are nevertheless features that aid the *mauvaise foi*, and so mask the truth. The central issue is how important people consider themselves to be. Britton often mocks this seriousness, as in his comment ‘Capitalist in the Capitalist

⁸⁸ Terry Keefe, *French Existentialist Fiction: Changing Moral Perspectives* (London: Croom Helm, c. 1986), p. 61.

system (vide Sir Alfred Mond)', as though quoting from a scholarly text (p. 571).

'See' would not have had the same effect at all: the laconic, pretentious use of the Latin sums up a whole world of bourgeois *mauvaise foi*.

The *mauvaise foi* that Britton sees in the working classes exists in the police and the army, or in any members of the working-class public who are deceived by the dominant ideology, which is evidently at the same time a manifestation of 'false consciousness'. The main difference between this and *mauvaise foi*, though, is that 'false consciousness' covers a much larger number of people: for anyone to be in *mauvaise foi*, there has to be at least a suggestion that the subject is involved in lying to himself or herself, whereas such a criterion is not necessarily present in the concept of 'false consciousness'. For Britton, any kind of falsehood, even if unconscious, is pretence. It is clear to a reader of the chapter inserted into *Hunger and Love* at a late stage, 'Romance and Reality', that Britton sees romanticism as a snare set by the bourgeoisie to lead people into *mauvaise foi* (pp. 427–63). While she was in London, the then unpublished Nottinghamshire novelist Mollie Morris lent Britton the manuscript of her first novel, about which he had many comments to make, as she reveals in her unpublished autobiography: "'You don't mean that", he would say. "But that is how I saw it, Mr Britton!" "Think again! — Yes, I know it sounds very nice, but it's not true.'" ⁸⁹ Britton obviously believed that Morris had fallen into such a trap set by the bourgeoisie. For him, 'the truth' is our essence — unattainable, but towards which we should always be moving.

Roquentin spends time staring at portraits of former town dignitaries, commenting on their *mauvaise foi*, (although not mentioning it by name, even though Sartre and Beauvoir were discussing the concept several years earlier). For Arthur Phelps and others, the *mauvaise foi* of the ruling and the middle classes has held them back in a period that

⁸⁹ 'When All the Trees Were Green', p. 40.

belongs in the distant past. Through constantly transcending ourselves, we are making an authentic movement into the future. Everything else Britton sees as bourgeois lies: 'State the truth, and don't care a damn. That is the only way we shall be able to get together to build a new world.'⁹⁰

Britton's new world would clearly dispense with the bourgeoisie, as he makes clear in the 'Romance and Reality' chapter:

[The right to prevent] is their only reason for existence. It is what makes them bourgeois. It is what distinguishes them from the human. The human co-operates and strives forward along the line of human evolution; the bourgeois isolates, and works against evolution, and works to turn it back. The bourgeois is a substitute; his class purpose in life is to promote the condition of mind which shall be willing to accept substitutes for reality, in order that the bourgeois class quality itself may be accepted as a substitute for human nature, as human nature itself (p. 440).

Britton's stress on co-operation is of major importance. It should be remembered, though, that this is not a feature of *L'Être et le néant*, which emphasizes that conflict is necessary for transcendence. Furthermore, it seems that Britton is using 'the human' as a synonym of 'soul' — another favourite word of his — that is, as a kind of ideal. It seems very difficult to distinguish between these two concepts and 'the truth' for him.

But approached in 'authenticity' as opposed to the 'inauthenticity' of *mauvaise foi*, the transcendence towards 'the human' also appears to be very similar to Sartre's idea of essence. Arthur has chosen to create his own future, and that future is also one he wishes for everyone else: a notably Sartrean idea. In the letter to Winifred Holtby briefly quoted above in the 'Outsider Modernism' chapter, Britton says that 'as I am trying to get ahead of the race and bring it one step forward I mustn't expect them all to see the new ground

⁹⁰ Lionel Britton, 'Workers' Art in the Theatre', *New Clarion*, 9 September 1933, p. 223, LBC, Box 7, Folder 1.

before they've reached it', and then continues to talk about building a future.⁹¹ This may sound rather ambitious as a statement of intention, but it is at least clear. The real message of *Hunger and Love* is one of the mutual participation of everyone towards a common end — the betterment of humanity.

In the inter-war years, voices that had frequently been suppressed — those of women, spinsters in particular, blacks, homosexuals (if somewhat obliquely), and the working classes — were struggling to be heard. Those voices, implicitly or explicitly, called for change. They saw particular injustices done to political minorities and sought assimilation to the broader outside world on their own terms. There is no 'authentic' resolution of these opposites in Jean Rhys, although Holtby shows a resolution in *The Crowded Street*; there is no resolution in Anand, even though his first novel is optimistic at the end, and there is of course only a hesitant resolution in Davies. Britton was trying to achieve politically what Sartre believed he had achieved philosophically — a marriage of the internal with the external. For Britton, this represented utopia.

⁹¹ Lionel Britton, letter to Winifred Holtby, 29 January 1933.

CHAPTER 6

Past and Future Perfect?

In this chapter, following a few necessary definitions, I examine some representations of utopias and dystopias. I first analyse Britton's science fiction plays *Brain* and *Spacetime Inn*, and then illustrate other examples of utopia in an attempt to show how some utopias and dystopias, notably in science fiction, are particularly suited to express the hopes and fears of political minorities.

In his Introduction to Ralph Bates's *The Olive Field*, Valentine Cunningham states that 'Thirties' writing is obsessed by utopia'; novels representing these utopias are something that Andy Croft notes in the 'Experimental Novels' chapter of his thesis, adding an important point which can be used as a qualification to Cunningham's remark: 'The bulk of this fiction was negative in tone, imagining their author's worst fears'.¹ The terms 'utopia' and 'dystopia' require definition: merely to state that they clearly represent hopes and fears is evidently inadequate. Raymond Williams attempts a definition which is both succinct and all-embracing, dividing both utopias and dystopias into four not necessarily discrete categories. He calls the first utopia 'the paradise', with its vision of a 'happier kind of life [...] elsewhere'; the second is 'the externally altered world', where 'an unlooked-for natural event' changes things; the third is a 'willed transformation', where the changes come from social endeavour; and the fourth is the self-explanatory 'technological transformation'.² With the exception of Williams's first type of dystopia, 'the hell', the other categories bear the same titles as his utopias, although they of course have a negative

¹ Valentine Cunningham, Introduction, *The Olive Field*, p. [i]; 'Socialist Fiction in Britain in the 1930s', p. 249.

² Raymond Williams, 'Utopia and Science Fiction', in *Science Fiction: A Critical Guide*, ed. by Patrick Parrinder (London: Longman, 1979), pp. 52–66 (pp. 52–55).

meaning; and the two groups of categories are obviously frequently interchangeable because of their strong subjective element: one person's utopia is very often another's dystopia.

Utopias and dystopias are strongly represented in the literature of science fiction, although a definition of *this* term must be tentative because critics have not reached an agreement on one. Sarah Lefanu believes that there never will be a clear definition, and adds to Clute and Nicholls's wide-ranging survey of definitions by agreeing that the application of the label 'science fiction' is relative to the interests of those involved, but includes readers and writers as well as editors and publishers: 'science or society? Satire or speculation? Credibility or critique? It depends on what your priorities are'.³

Definitions of science fiction are often very similar, and almost invariably rather vague. Darko Suvin is a major critic of the genre, and gives an important and influential definition of it:

[A] literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment (Suvin's italics).⁴

Patrick Parrinder compares Suvin's word 'estrangement', as to some extent Suvin does himself, with the Russian Formalists's 'defamiliarization', causing the reader 'to see men in their present state as the unconscious prisoners of an ideology'.⁵ And defining 'fabulation' — a term closely related to science fiction — Robert Scholes calls it 'fiction that offers us a world clearly and radically discontinuous from the one we

³ Sarah Lefanu, *In the Chinks of the World Machine: Feminism and Science Fiction* (London: The Women's Press, 1988), p. 21.

⁴ Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 7–8.

⁵ Patrick Parrinder, 'Characterization in Science Fiction: Two Approaches: 2. The Alien Encounter, or Ms Brown and Mrs Le Guin', in *Science Fiction: A Critical Guide*, pp. 148–61 (p. 149).

know, yet returns to confront that known world in some cognitive way'.⁶ Many books which would not immediately appear to belong to the science fiction genre could be included in the above definitions, and there seems to be a scientific or technological element missing.⁷ But by putting these three quotations together I can, without adding too much to them, attempt a definition to suit the particular preoccupations of this chapter: science fiction is a literary genre whose narratives depict imaginary situations, usually in the future but occasionally in the present or the past, which are technologically and/or ideologically removed from the reader's contemporary situation, and which explicitly or implicitly comment on that situation. Such a definition includes relatively common narratives concerning present-day society as seen from the viewpoint of a visitor from another planet, although it probably excludes gothic, fantasy, hybrid genres or science fiction as pure escapism, for instance, but then these areas are not within the remit of the present chapter.

Very little internal working-class literature of the inter-war years can be described as science fiction, and Lionel Britton's *Brain* and *Spacetime Inn* are even more unusual because science fiction plays of any kind are very rare in any period. As an indication of the reason for this, Clute and Nicholls quote science fiction editor Roger Elwood on the physical limitations which the theatre poses for the genre: 'Writing an sf play is a bit like trying to picture infinity in a cigar box'; they also state that 'the first significant original plays appeared in the 1920s and 1930s', claiming that Shaw's *Back to Methuselah* (1921)

⁶ Robert Scholes, *Structural Fabulation: An Essay on Fiction of the Future* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), p. 29.

⁷ According to Clute and Nicholls, for example, Kafka has been an 'enormous' influence on many science fiction writers, and their book includes an entry on the writer, mentioning 'The Penal Colony' and 'The Metamorphosis' in particular, *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, pp. 2, 655).

was the first science fiction play to be concerned with evolution.⁸ *Back to Methuselah* is thematically and structurally similar to *Brain*, and certainly to some extent Britton took Shaw's play as his model: he includes a quotation from Shaw's Preface on the verso of the half-title page of *Brain*, and the drama critic Hannen Swaffer — whose review of the play is quoted in one of the advertisement pages at the back of *Hunger and Love* — notes Shaw's influence: 'Fancy a young man starting where Shaw left off!' (p. [707]).⁹

There are a number of dramatic elements in *Brain*, such as the light show during the funeral of the Philosopher and the Librarian of the British Museum, the violent change of power at the end of Act II, and the apocalyptic climax of the play, but although some of the dialogue is also dramatic, the general emphasis is on the didactic; there is little character development and most of the characters are types. Of primary importance is the message, which is that without co-operation, as opposed to competition, the world cannot survive.

Brain is the theatrical realization of the ideas outlined or hinted at in *Hunger and Love*; it is in three acts and is set in several different periods in the future. Act I (c.1950–2100) begins with a conversation between the Philosopher and the Librarian, in which there is an exposition of the ideas in an unpublished manuscript which strongly resembles *Hunger and Love*, which, following the death of the author, was presented to the British Museum in 1950; both men die in a car accident the same evening and the manuscript remains uncatalogued and unnoticed. The next scene then shifts to 2100, when the earth is still run by the business world and central government; Britton makes use of the animal imagery prominent in *Hunger and Love* in order to emphasize his points: in the first scene, we are told that 'private enterprise makes for isolation like wild beasts', and that 'the beast type of

⁸ *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, p. 1216; Bernard Shaw, *Back to Methuselah: A Metabiological Pentateuch* (London: Constable, 1921; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1939).

⁹ *Brain*, p. [iii].

man is still in control; they occupy all the high places'.¹⁰ The 2100 world of *Brain* shows Britton's anti-government ideology in practice; Brookes, a prominent member of the Ideas Club, is preparing to make a proposal after the discovery of the forgotten manuscript, and begins by outlining the problem: 'Human nature grew by co-operation, private interest is anti-human, it will destroy human nature unless some means can be found by which it can itself be destroyed.'¹¹ The main point of interest in these lines is the way in which the tenses proceed from the past, to the present, and to the future. 'Human nature' is thought to be the product of many years of co-operation and signifies a more enlightened, and more honest, period in history; the private interest now dominating life is divisive and works against human interest; human nature will be destroyed by it unless its advance can be stopped. Brookes is in effect saying the same thing as the narrator of *Hunger and Love*, namely that the evolution of humanity is now in reverse: the slow movement towards a utopian society is changing into its opposite. Brookes's proposal leads to the clandestine establishment of the Brain Brotherhood, the purpose of which is to build a giant brain in the Sahara, containing all the knowledge in the world.¹² An idea similar to this is also put forward in *Hunger and Love*, and incidentally seems in part to anticipate the Internet, or the Internet of the future: 'Why can't all the books be stored in one big building, properly classified and indexed and catalogued, so that anybody who wants anything at all can get it at once: write, telephone, call, — get it immediately' (pp. 295–96).

Act II is set in the twenty-fourth century and mainly concerns the consternation of the business community and the government over the increasingly powerful Brain

¹⁰ *Brain*, pp. 12, 25.

¹¹ *Brain*, p. 25.

¹² The decision to build Brain in Africa is because of the potential space for development and because the land is cheap, although no considerations about possible colonial implications of this proposal are explored. At the same time, though, this would make Africa the intellectual centre of the world, as well as the centre of rebellion against the dominant capitalist ethos of the western world.

Brotherhood, which many doctors, scientists, writers, engineers, and the working classes have joined; members of the organization, who receive no money apart from any needed for use in contact with the outside world, are seriously affecting the efficient running of the business community. Any attempts to prevent a company's shipping orders from reaching the Sahara, for instance, are blocked by Brotherhood infiltrators. The Prime Minister feels increasingly isolated and, ironically, is beginning to feel like an outsider himself. He says, 'Laugh at me if you like, but it is as if we are becoming outcasts from the world', and believes that the existence of an Anti-War League means that the 'good old days are gone'.¹³ But the inexorable power of the Brotherhood is such that even members of the government have applied to join it, although without success apart from one exception: the Fourth Minister (one of the few 'human' politicians) has been approved for admission largely because he has written a socialist play and is a lover of the arts. He has a vision of the future world: 'I have the feeling that in [...] ten years [...] the life of Ministries and Governments will have passed away, and we who now possess power and eminence will have become outcasts in a darkness outside the human sphere.'¹⁴ Predictably, the government decides to dispense with his services, although his expectations of the future are realized: by the end of the act, the world outside the Brain Brotherhood is in chaos before the people take over.

In Act III, all the action is in the far future; money no longer exists and crime too appears to be a thing of the past; there are no more wars, no private property or distinct classes, and unpleasant jobs are shared equally between everyone; each individual is working towards the improvement of society; disease has been eliminated, and even a sneeze causes alarm; sexual inhibitions are a thing of the past and monogamy is not the norm, although the few who choose to live in a permanent relationship usually have 'side-

¹³ *Brain*, pp. 43, 54.

¹⁴ *Brain*, p. 47.

mates'; applications have to be made to begin a 'propagating union', and it is unusual for a couple to be allowed to have custody of their own children.¹⁵

Brain is a centralized computer and has become the new God, as indicated by the capitalization of 'It(s)', and It lists tasks from an intricate network of activities more or less freely chosen by the people. Anyone with a strong research project can be chosen by Brain to take a 'B. C.', meaning 'Brain-controlled' research towards a goal which will benefit society; following that, the highest accolade is to be allowed to work within the Brain itself.

The language used in *Brain* reflects the changed society; because the emphasis is now on the nature of the activity performed, the play is punctuated by references to 'Regulars', 'Compulsories' and 'Playgames'; oaths have changed focus and emotions such as anger, annoyance or surprise are often conveyed by expressions such as 'Mankind!', 'Race!', 'Co-operate!', 'Humanity!' or 'Struggle!': in a world where the old God has no meaning, blasphemies are replaced by invocations of co-operative activity.

The ageing process, though, has not been arrested, and those unfit for work because too old are painlessly put to death. Wild-Eye is an elderly character in *Brain* who has to undergo the Death Test (a kind of measurement of people's readiness for 'euthanasia'), but he is not in pain and does not want to die: quite simply, he is becoming surplus to the needs of society and although he receives a temporary reprieve, his time to die will soon be ordained by Brain. Towards the end of the play, Brain says that it is imperative to gain 'spacetime control' in order for the world to survive and other Brains to continue elsewhere.¹⁶ However, 'the human' is too late, and as It says just before a star destroys the earth:

¹⁵ *Brain*, p. 112.

¹⁶ *Brain*, p. 98.

A thousand million years life was on earth, there was time for men to come together, the human to have evolved sooner, like beasts they preyed on one another, the human idea was not born. [...] all worlds might have worked together, all consciousness grown into a unity, we might have called on other worlds...had we been human sooner...like beasts they preyed on one another, isolated in immensity, one man sapped the strength of another. Where there were two strengths there was less than one. [...] Too late, too late!¹⁷

The speech is written as a list of phrases without conjunctions: the emphasis is on the separateness which has so long divided the beast from 'the human'. The tragedy of *Brain* is that the ideology of co-operation has not been applied sufficiently, even after the year 50,000,000, to enable the evacuation of the earth for another world before the star eventually destroys the planet.

All things considered, *Brain* depicts a harshly sterile world in which any negative thought — that is, any thought against Brain — is a mental aberration, as in the comment 'Your psychical basis has slipped'.¹⁸ It is sometimes difficult to judge if Britton is being serious or satirical, and utopia seems at times to be distinctly dystopian from an early twenty-first century viewpoint. Caliban may have disappeared, but this is *Brave New World* rather than a brave new world.

Before taking a brief look at *Spacetime Inn*, it is illuminating to consider it in relation to J. B. Priestley's *Dangerous Corner* (1933) because both plays were — directly on Priestley's part, although probably indirectly on Britton's — influenced by the ideas of J. W. Dunne, specifically by his *An Experiment with Time* (1927). Priestley states that *Dangerous Corner*, the first of his 'Time' plays, was partly written 'to make use of the device of splitting time into two, thus showing what *might* have happened, an idea that has

¹⁷ *Brain*, p. 127.

¹⁸ *Spacetime Inn*, p. 111.

always fascinated me'.¹⁹ Priestley's play concerns a group of people united by marriage and profession, and consists of two acts, the first of which is much longer than the other: in the first, the whole group is slowly and irreparably fractured by an apparently innocuous cigarette box; in the second, events continue a virtually uninterrupted course without any knowledge of the potentially destructive secret of the box. A point here is that the (no doubt coincidental) 'dangerous corner' which is avoided in Priestley's second ending is the same expression used about a car accident in Lionel Britton's Prologue to *Spacetime Inn*, after which all the characters are thrown into a time-warp, and all the action then takes place in *Spacetime Inn*. There are other coincidences between the two plays: almost all of *Dangerous Corner* is a constantly unfolding nightmare for its characters but shows an alternative future if a crucial event had never happened; in *Spacetime Inn* hell is also other people, and Britton's play implicitly warns of the apocalyptic consequences of allowing present (here political rather than social and commercial) events to continue unchanged.

The characters in *Spacetime Inn* are intended to be seen as symbolic, as is explained on the front flap of the dust jacket: '*Spacetime Inn* deals with the crisis in civilisation from a symbolical but fundamental point of view.' All of the characters, apart from the contemporary Bernard Shaw and Bill and Jim, the two interchangeable representatives of the working classes, are notable figures from different periods in the past. Jim and Bill appear to be of very limited intelligence and are harangued by heads of state (the Queen of Sheba, Napoleon, and Queen Victoria) playing war games, and intellectuals (Shakespeare, Samuel Johnson, Karl Marx and Bernard Shaw) playing mind games, with them. At the end of the play, as a result of a misunderstanding, Jim and Bill deliberately blow up everyone in the inn, as well as themselves. As in *Brain*, the emphasis is more on the didactic than the dramatic.

¹⁹ J. B. Priestley, *The Plays of J. B. Priestley*, 3 vols (London: Heinemann, 1948), I, p. viii.

If *Brain*, before its equally apocalyptic climax, depicts many of Britton's ideas of utopia, *Spacetime Inn* predominantly represents his dystopia. J. S. Clarke was instrumental in having Britton read the play to M. P.s because he felt that it contained an important warning: unless nothing was done to bridge the rift between the classes, there would be serious consequences. Along with many people, Britton is strongly concerned about the structure the future will take, and looks forward to a more socially equitable society as capitalism was generally thought to be in terminal decline: the idea of the social and spiritual bankruptcy of western civilization was writ large on the cultural landscape. In his Introduction to Christopher Caudwell's posthumously published *Romance and Realism* (1970), Samuel Hynes remarks: 'It was obvious from the beginning of the Thirties that western civilization was undergoing an unprecedented crisis — economic collapse, the rise of fascism, the failure of liberal leadership, the threat of war'.²⁰ Other serious problems throughout the inter-war can be added to this list: the effect of the previous war on contemporary psychology, the Wall Street crash, the general strike of 1926, increasing migration to urban areas and mass unemployment.

A fictional example of this feeling of a crisis in civilization is particularly prevalent in Rhys Davies's *Rings on her Fingers*, such as when the narrator, speaking for Edith, says 'There was something rotten in modern life, there was something diseased, annihilating, that destroyed all the fine establishments of human love and understanding.'²¹ Edith's friend Raglan speaks the same language: 'You've got the female of the evil germs that are in my blood — and we've caught them from the rotten source of our civilization'.²² It is no coincidence that Edith temporarily escapes from her businessman husband to Zennor, the

²⁰ *Romance and Realism: A Study in Bourgeois English Literature by Christopher Caudwell*, ed. by Samuel Hynes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 15.

²¹ *Rings on her Fingers*, p. 226.

²² *Rings on her Fingers*, p. 231.

village in Cornwall where Lawrence spent nearly two years, and where he initially went 'as if it were in some sort of Promised Land [...] of the spirit'.²³ In Lawrence's search for a new world, his symbol (first drawn in a letter to his friend S. S. Koteliensky in 1915) is a phoenix rising from the flames of the old world, which is very much the image that Raglan conveys: 'They say the Western World is in its last solstice, that we are being received into decay. If that is so, let it be — but let it come quickly, for I want to rise again in the new world, I want to rise again clean of this horror that's creeping upon me.'²⁴

If society was seen to be in crisis, utopia was frequently seen as an escape from or as an antidote to it. The criticisms of society implicit or explicit in works by internal working-class writers often contain ideas about a much better future or (occasionally) an exemplary society in the past, although only Grassie Gibbon and Britton depict such societies via science fiction. And it is of course relevant that Grassie Gibbon and Britton were both anarchists. Of note when considering Lionel Britton as essentially anarchist is Klaus's comment: 'No matter the name, it is in the end the extent of writers' affinities with anarchist attitudes and projects that is relevant.'²⁵ The May 1931 issue of *Freedom* reproduces an article from the *Reformers' Year Book 1902*, in which there is a useful explanation of the tenets of anarchism:

[Anarchism] views life and social relations with eyes disillusioned. Making an end to all superstitions, prejudices, and false sentiments, it tries to see things as they really are; and without building castles in the air it finds by the simple correlation of established facts the grandest possibilities of a full and free life can be placed within the reach of all, once that monstrous

²³ *The Quest for Rananim: D. H. Lawrence's Letters to S. S. Koteliensky 1914 to 1930*, ed. by George J. Zytaruk (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1970), p. 71.

²⁴ *Rings on her Fingers*, p. 231; *The Quest for Rananim*, p. xxxix.

²⁵ 'To Hell with Culture', p. 9.

bulwark of all our social iniquities — the State — has been destroyed, and common property declared.²⁶

It is difficult to imagine either Britton or Grassie Gibbon being in disagreement with any of the above principles, particularly with the ideology of rigid adherence to ‘the truth’ and the destruction of the state.

Grassie Gibbon’s anarchist credentials are without question: in *Beyond the Sunset* (1973) Douglas F. Young draws attention to Gibbon’s sympathy with anarchism and to the fact that Gibbon sent his son to A. S. Neill’s radical Summerhill school; in *A Blasphemer & Reformer* (1984), William K. Malcolm devotes a three-page section to Gibbon and anarchism, reminding the reader that Gibbon spoke of ‘St Bakunin’ in his essay ‘Glasgow’.²⁷ More recently, in a longer piece on Gibbon and anarchism, Malcolm states that ‘[h]is utopian political ideal portraying a free and just society is anarchist in conception, predicated, very like Kropotkin’s, on a belief in natural human values and instincts.’²⁸ But Britton’s anarchism is slightly more difficult to ascertain. For many years he was very sympathetic towards communism, and shortly before his eager departure for Russia, in a letter to Herbert Marshall in Moscow, he optimistically closed with ‘Yours Britski’; however, as mentioned above in the biographical section of the Introduction, after living in the country for three months, Britton returned disillusioned.²⁹ In *Hunger and Love*, though, there are many indications that Britton hated all forms of government, and his initial enthusiasm for the new Russia seems very similar to Gibbon’s comment that

²⁶ Anonymous, ‘Anarchist Communism: Its Aims and Principles’, *Freedom*, May 1931, p. 6.

²⁷ Douglas F. Young, *Beyond the Sunset: A Study of James Leslie Mitchell (Lewis Grassie Gibbon)* (Aberdeen: Impulse, 1973), pp. 26–27; William K. Malcolm, *A Blasphemer & Reformer: A Study of James Leslie Mitchell/Lewis Grassie Gibbon* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1984), pp. 18–21 (p. 19).

²⁸ William K. Malcolm, ‘Art for Politics’ Sake: The Sardonic Principle of James Leslie Mitchell (Lewis Grassie Gibbon), in ‘Down with Culture’, pp. 35–50 (p. 40).

²⁹ Lionel Britton, letter to Herbert Marshall, 9 May 1935, LBC, Box 2, Folder 11.

‘Communism we must have before we can have the No-state’, as he wrote in a letter to Tom Wintringham, a friend from the Writers’ International.³⁰ It seems highly likely that Britton too originally saw communism as a prelude to anarchism; certainly, anarchist publications welcomed his work, and Britton contributed an article about a group of anarchists to a magazine.³¹ And at least one critic describes him as such: Philip Henderson states that ‘he is ‘an anarchist rather than a socialist’.³² *Brain* certainly shows key elements of an anarchist society, although it remains a problem play in that area: the people in it have a great amount of freedom, but in the end Brain remains a kind of dictator, and the people are not free to choose exactly what they want to do.

Grassic Gibbon uses science fiction to express his anarchist ideas in *Three Go Back* (1932) and *Gay Hunter* (1934), writing as his ‘English’ self and using his real name ‘J. Leslie Mitchell’; and although the novels are set in the distant past and the far future respectively, *Gay Hunter* (which also has a reference to J. W. Dunne, which shows his influence on Gibbon too) is post-apocalyptic and shows a ‘primitive’ society very similar to the pre-historic world of *Three Go Back*.³³ All of the characters in the two books are or are forced to become hunter–gatherers; Gibbon’s two novels are largely inspired by the Diffusionist ideas of Grafton Elliot Smith, who believed that the adoption of agriculture was directly responsible for the decline of civilization. Britton appears to have similar ideas: in attempting to illustrate the ideas of the narrator of the manuscript regarding evolution working in reverse, the Philosopher in *Brain* gives as an example the marine

³⁰ ‘*To Hell with Culture*’, p. 40.

³¹ Lionel Britton, ‘Anarchists at Whiteway’, *Contempo: A Review of Books and Personalities*, 15 November 1931, [n. pg.], LBC, Box 6, Folder 11.

³² *Literature: And a Changing Civilisation*, p. 145.

³³ Lewis Grassic Gibbon, *Three Go Back* (London: Jarrolds (as ‘J. Leslie Mitchell’), 1932; repr. Edinburgh: Polygon, 1995); Lewis Grassic Gibbon, *Gay Hunter* (London: Jarrolds (as ‘J. Leslie Mitchell’), 1934; repr. Edinburgh: Polygon, 1989), pp. 12–14.

animal the tunicate (which ‘develops’ from a vertebrate to an invertebrate) as an example of this phenomenon in the natural world.³⁴ Douglas F. Young notes that Gibbon sees ‘modern civilization as a cancerous growth which ha[s] taken root deeply within human life and [i]s slowly destroying it’.³⁵ The use of the disease imagery is familiar, and in *Three Go Back* Gibbon uses it in a similar way to Britton, along with similar metonyms showing disgust with modern civilization:

The eager, starved, mind-crippled creatures of the diseased lust of men were twenty thousand generations unborn. The veil, the priest, the wedding ring, the pornographic novel, and all the unclean drama of two beasts enchained by sex and law and custom were things beyond comprehension of the childlike minds in those golden heads or the vivid desires of those golden bodies.³⁶

There are no conventional institutions in Gibbon’s utopian society, and sex is neither bridled by ceremonies nor treated as unclean. In the extract above, utopia is associated with primitive societies, and with them goes the celebration of nakedness. Nakedness is associated with freedom and health, and both of the protagonists in *Gay Hunter* and *Three Go Back* delight in their nudity. And Domina Riddoch in Gibbon’s *The Thirteenth Disciple* — not a work of science fiction — also strongly emphasizes the joys of nudity in former times and associates clothes with an unhealthy mind: ‘The fun to live in a time when a naked body or a naked thought didn’t raise the sniggering of the padded civilized! Poets had sense when they saw Adam and Eve nude in Eden.’³⁷ She adds, ‘There was a Golden Age. [...] Once upon a time there were neither metals

³⁴ *Brain*, p. 11.

³⁵ *Beyond the Sunset*, p. 24.

³⁶ *Three Go Back*, pp. 99, 105.

³⁷ Lewis Grassie Gibbon, *The Thirteenth Disciple* (London: Jarrolds (as ‘J. Leslie Mitchell’), 1931; repr. Edinburgh: B&W, 1995), p. 166.

nor wars, scandals nor clothes nor kings.’³⁸ The society without government, law, or technological ‘progress’ obviously represents Grassic Gibbon’s ideal society, and to some extent Riddoch is its mouthpiece. To Gibbon, the pre-agricultural past is utopian, and is the kind of society towards which the world should be evolving. Significantly, Riddoch speaks of the ‘disadvantage of not having lived eight thousand years ago — or five hundred hence.’³⁹ She takes it as understood that human society is moving towards a more enlightened future, and utopia is thus seen either in the distant past or the far future. Britton also takes nakedness as an accepted feature of a more advanced society: it is associated with truth and openness. Britton boasted that he slept naked, and his characters in *Brain* are naked too. Even in the dystopian *Spacetime Inn*, there is a utopian element in the character Eve. Bill says: ‘You’re wonderful! All the nasty fings y’aint never ’eard of! On’y the beautiful fings’.⁴⁰ The natural, naked Eve too of course represents for Britton a time before humankind disappeared into an evolutionary cul-de-sac, and it is no accident that representations of Eve are part of Grassic Gibbon’s pre-lapsarian Golden Age. Britton’s idea of regressive evolution is similar to Gibbon’s, although unlike Gibbon, technological improvements are of course a part of his much more organized utopia.

Although there are probably no other internal working-class writers of science fiction, there are many utopian visions in conventional working-class literature, which are sometimes expressed mildly, as in the vastly improved working conditions in the ship where Bill Gorgon works in Dick Beech’s short story ‘A Home from Home’, where the division between the officers and crew’s sleeping quarters have become more democratized, all can listen to the wireless through ear-phones, have access to good

³⁸ *The Thirteenth Disciple*, p. 167.

³⁹ *The Thirteenth Disciple*, p. 166.

⁴⁰ *Spacetime Inn*, p. 49.

washing facilities, and a wardrobe and lockers; the final paragraph reveals the utopia to be a dream sequence.⁴¹ The utopias present in other working-class works are far more frequently and far more directly expressed as socialist or communist ideals to work towards in a dystopia in the present or recent past. The following vision of international socialism is from James Welsh's *The Underworld* (1920), where a representation of the Miners Federation leader Bob Smillie speaks of the future:

And then, when we have [...] raised the mental vision of our people, and strengthened their moral outlook, we can appeal to the workers of other lands to join us in bringing about the time when we'll be able to regard each other, not as enemies, but as members of one great Humanity, working for each other's welfare as we work for our own.⁴²

Like Britton, Smillie sees education as having a vital role, and many of the above words are recognisable as the same or at least very similar to those of the narrator of *Hunger and Love*; the emphasis is evidently on co-operation as opposed to competition. And also of note is that the final paragraph of *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* looks to 'the gilded domes and glittering pinnacles of the beautiful cities of the future, when men shall dwell together in true brotherhood and goodwill and joy'.⁴³

Some books such as *Hunger and Love* and *Brain*, then, see the importance of technology in the movement towards a better future for all. Another such book is Anand's *Untouchable*, which expresses the need for a casteless society, and a flushing toilet is seen as the means towards the achievement of this. The poet in the novel says:

[T]he first thing we will do when we accept the machine, will be to introduce the machine which clears dung without anyone having to handle it — the flush system. Then the sweepers can be free

⁴¹ Dick Beech, 'A Home from Home', (*Worker*, 17 August 1928; repr. in *Tramps, Workmates and Revolutionaries*), pp. 55-57.

⁴² *The Underworld*, p. 58.

⁴³ *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, p. 587.

from the stigma of untouchability and assume the dignity of status that is their right as useful members of a casteless and classless society.⁴⁴

It is not only in working-class literature, or working-class representatives in literature as in *Untouchable*, where the urge towards utopia is found, but also in the writings of other political minorities. However, not all utopias are easy to detect in a writer's work. Rhys Davies's utopia of homosexual acceptance is necessarily expressed in veiled terms; unconventionally, he devotes a chapter in his autobiography to a person he never knew, the doctor William Price, who practised druidic rituals. This returns us to the familiar theme of the importance of nakedness and its associated qualities to certain utopias, and Tony Brown notes that:

The significance of [William Price's behaviour] for the homosexual Davies is clear [...]. Here was a man who not only saw the body and its impulses as wholly natural — he sunbathed in the nude — but 'treated physical passion as something which was not objectionable and was not to be deplored'.⁴⁵

Like the Silurian on the train mentioned in the previous chapter, Price represents a freer, more natural and more enlightened era: in other words Davies feels that civilization has caused us to lose a certain vitality, and a certain truth. We are not far from the territory of Britton and Grassie Gibbon. The desire for a freer kind of life represented by nudity is also in Davies's short story, 'Revelation'. In this, Mrs Montague, having mistaken Gomer Vaughan for her husband, opens the door to him in the nude; but the real revelation is not the nudity itself, even though the married Gomer has never seen a naked woman before: much more revealing to him is that 'She wasn't

⁴⁴ *Untouchable*, p. 155.

⁴⁵ *Rhys Davies: Decoding the Hare*, p. 77.

ashamed, not she.’⁴⁶ Quite by chance, Montague’s French wife has introduced Gomer to a very different world from that of the constraints of his own wife Blodwen’s Welsh chapel mentality, which is here interpreted as believing that ‘Respectable women [...] kept themselves a mystery to men.’ For Davies, Blodwen represents the ‘padded civilized’ that Domina Riddoch rails against, and which Britton detests: clothes represent a negative, repressive mentality, whereas the naked body stands for freedom and truth.

And still veiled, although far more explicit than many of Davis’s indications of difference, are his hints at the persecution of homosexuals in *Honey and Bread* (1935) as revealed by the exaggerated anger caused by an inseparable pair of ganders which refuse to associate with the geese: ‘They ought to be killed, indeed, straight away’, and ‘It isn’t natural at all, and never ought to be’.⁴⁷ But the sensitive protagonist Owen sees things very differently, and his voice is full of understanding and tolerance:

Nature is very strange on occasion [...] She doesn’t always behave strictly as men expect her to. It seems that she likes to tease us sometimes [...] I should just leave the poor ganders to themselves if they were mine. They seem so content with each other.⁴⁸

It is clear that this is a coded plea for the toleration of homosexuality by Davies. And of relevance to this are the coded words and ‘parables’ of homosexuality that Bozorth analyses in Auden’s poetry, which would only have been understood by a few of the poet’s friends.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Rhys Davies: *Collected Stories* ed. by Meic Stephens, 2 vols (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1996), 1, p. 60.

⁴⁷ Rhys Davies, *Honey and Bread* (London: Putnam, 1935; repr. Bath: Chivers, 1970), p. 80.

⁴⁸ *Honey and Bread*, p. 82.

⁴⁹ Richard R. Bozorth, *Auden’s Games of Knowledge: Poetry and the Meanings of Homosexuality* (Columbia University Press, 2001).

Non-science fictional utopias are many, but perhaps the representation of utopias (and dystopias), especially those of political minorities, is facilitated through the medium of science fiction. Many science fiction novels by women, and feminist ones in particular, for instance, have been written since the beginning of the twentieth century, such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman with her all-female utopia *Herland* (1915), Winifred Holtby's bemused visitor from Tristan da Cunha to a dystopian Britain in *The Astonishing Island* (1933), Katharine Burdekin with *Proud Man* (1934), about an androgynous visitor to a dystopian England, and Joanna Russ with such works as *The Female Man* (1975) with its exploration of sexual identity.⁵⁰ Lefanu sees science fiction as a way of freeing women writers from 'the constraints of realism'; interestingly, she then continues her argument with the use of Suvin's word 'estrangement':

The social and sexual hierarchies of the contemporary world can be examined through the process of 'estrangement', thus challenging normative ideas of gender roles; and visions of different worlds can be created, made familiar to the reader through the process of narrative. SF narrative can be used to break down, or to build up.⁵¹

Here, the breaking down referred to is the patriarchal society and the building up is of a feminist utopia.

Taking the cue for his title from the 1968 French revolutionary slogan '*Soyez raisonnable, demandez l'impossible*', Tom Moylan says:

⁵⁰ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland* (*Forerunner*, 1915; repr. London: The Women's Press, 1979); Winifred Holtby, *The Astonishing Island: Being a Veracious Record of the Experience Undergone by Robinson Lippingtree Mackintosh from Tristan da Cunha during an Accidental Visit to Unknown Territory in the Year of Grace MCMCC?* (London: Dickson, 1933); Murray Constantine, *Proud Man* (London: Boriswood, 1934; repr. (as 'Katharine Burdekin') New York: Feminist Press, 1989); Joanna Russ, *The Female Man* (New York: Bantam, 1975; repr. London: Star, 1977).

⁵¹ *In the Chinks of the World Machine*, pp. 21–22.

[Utopia] is, at heart, rooted in the unfulfilled needs and wants of specific classes, groups, and individuals in their unique historical contexts. Produced through the fantasizing powers of the imagination, utopia opposes the affirmative culture maintained by the dominant ideology. Utopia negates the contradictions in a social system by forging visions of what is not yet realized either in theory or practice. In generating such figures of hope, utopia contributes to the open space of opposition.⁵²

If the working classes, homosexuals, women and other political minorities are included in these groups then science fiction — and its utopias and dystopias in particular — can clearly be seen as an oppositional force against a hegemonic bourgeois, male, heterosexual, white society: it can be a major literary weapon against the status quo.

Lionel Britton, via the highly unusual means of drama, makes use of science fiction to illustrate his particular evolutionary vision of a classless world. *Brain* is a summation, a dramatic exposition of, the ideas in *Hunger and Love*. Interestingly, too, and bearing in mind the interpretation possible from Darko Suvin's broad definition quoted at the beginning of this chapter, even *Hunger and Love* can be read, at least in part, as a work of science fiction. *Hunger and Love* has much to say about working-class conditions in the inter-war years, but it also has a great deal to say about the future.

⁵² Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (New York: Methuen, 1986), pp. 1–2.

CONCLUSION

Until recently, most of the internal working-class writers of the inter-war years had long been forgotten; with the exception of Robert Tressell, whose only novel was published slightly before this period, perhaps the only widely known authors were Lewis Grassic Gibbon, Walter Greenwood and James Hanley. Twenty years ago, in a review of the multi-authored *The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century* edited by Jeremy Hawthorn, Christopher Pawling expressed his disapproval of the existence of a canon of working-class novels — such as the well-known ones by some of the writers above — because it ‘might prove as restrictive in its own way as Leavis’s “Great Tradition”’, and agrees with Graham Holderness that ‘until the texts of working-class novels [...] are reprinted and educationally mobilized on a much larger scale, there can be no effective general recovery to shift radically the political balance of the literary tradition’.¹ Possibly taking a cue from the forgotten women writers being published by Virago Press, in the second half of the twentieth century there was a revival of interest in forgotten working-class literature, and in the fiction of the inter-war years in particular. Several working-class novels had already been re-published before Pawling’s article appeared, although a far greater number have been re-issued since. In addition, over the last thirty years a number of critical books and articles dedicated exclusively to working-class literature have been written: along with the working-class canon mentioned above, readers and researchers have become acquainted with many of the more obscure internal working-class writers. And although there has been no re-publication of any work by F. C. Boden, James Halward,

¹ Christopher Pawling, ‘Jeremy Hawthorn, (ed.) *The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century*’, *Literature and History*, 12:1 (1986), pp. 134–35 (p. 135).

Jack Hilton or James Welsh, for instance, all of these writers have been acknowledged in some of these critical works.

Lionel Britton's work has not been re-published either, and he is also an exception in that there is virtually no mention of him in the recent critical publications; on the rare occasions when Britton is mentioned at all, it is usually only in a few words in passing, and even this information very often contains errors. Nevertheless, he was a fairly well-known figure in the early 1930s, and was probably better known at the time than many other working-class authors. By mentioning Britton's name to director Sir Barry Jackson, Bernard Shaw was instrumental in making the theatrical performance of *Brain* possible; Bertrand Russell also helped Britton a great deal by writing a five-page Introduction to *Hunger and Love*, which reviewers noted extensively and enthusiastically; and Britton's name was frequently spoken of at the same time as some of the canonical working-class writers. In addition, many reviews of the novel were very positive, with several people suggesting that the novel was a work of genius; Arnold Bennett wrote a pastiche of Britton's writing style in what became his final review for the *Evening Standard*, and several other reviewers predicted great success for him. For a brief time Britton was frequently in the news, became drama critic at the *New Clarion*, and was in strong demand to make public appearances. The chapters in *Hunger and Love* which deal with bookshop assistant Arthur Phelps struggling to educate himself in spite of the colossal odds against him are vivid and highly memorable, and Philip Henderson says that '[Britton's] picture of the struggle for life of the orphan errand-boy [...] gives his work the quality of an epic'.² Even Rebecca West, one of the book's greatest detractors, felt forced to say that she had a 'soft spot' for Arthur. But clearly, and despite the fact that there was nothing lacking in Britton's ability to depict a vividly sympathetic character, it is a memory which has not

² *Literature: And a Changing Civilisation*, p. 144.

endured: after 1935, no more imaginative works of Britton's were published and he rapidly slipped into public oblivion.

The reasons for Britton's obscurity are many. The nature of *Hunger and Love* itself, a very long novel without a plot and with hundreds of pages of scientific and philosophical digressions, is not an obvious foundation for widespread or lasting interest; Britton constantly used to revise his manuscripts and consequently had difficulty satisfactorily completing any of his work; his chosen sub-genres, the working-class novel and science fiction drama, encompass two very different areas of literature which are quite apart from the mainstream; there were considerable publishing difficulties during World War II; and his relationship with publishers could be very strained.

This last detail, especially his refusal to allow publishers to cut or in any other way alter any of his material, was undoubtedly the greatest stumbling block to Britton's publishing career. For several years Britton had difficulties finding a publisher for his novel, and although Constable initially showed interest, they were not prepared to accept it without substantial emendations. Nevertheless, Constant Huntington did recognize *Hunger and Love* as a significant work of its kind, and accepted the book for publication under Britton's stringent conditions. And on receiving permission from Putnam to proceed as he wished, Britton began systematically emending the typescript to include stronger language than it had previously contained. His intentions were essentially twofold: to make the language of the book a more authentic reflection of the language used at the time, and to make it reflect his anger with bourgeois society. *Hunger and Love* is quite possibly unique in the history of a major publishing house — especially for a first novel — in that no words or punctuation marks (with the almost inevitable exceptions of typesetting errors) were changed from Britton's final submission of the typescript to the date of publication. In spite of any possible objections to the rather strong language for the time, and regardless of any factual or typographical errors there may have been, *Hunger and Love* reached the

bookshops as Britton was determined it would. The result of this is that Britton believed that he had finally triumphed over the bourgeois world, and that he had written a major working-class work, one untainted by bourgeois lies and designed as a hammer blow against the middle class.

Plainly, the above circumstances make *Hunger and Love* very unusual and therefore very interesting, but the book is more than merely a fascinating oddity. It deserves recognition for its originality and for its literary achievement. *Hunger and Love* is a remarkable experimental working-class novel, and one of very few such books in that sub-genre. But in a number of ways it is also — and this is perhaps another reason for its neglect — a novel that differs greatly from the working-class fiction of the day.

One of the main differences is that Britton's novel not only depicts, often in graphic detail, the world of an unfortunate member of the working classes and the appalling conditions in which he lives and works, but it also traces the intellectual development of this young man over about ten years, and the reader follows this development as if through the mind of Arthur, pursuing his many mental digressions and learning of his fears, desires, doubts, disappointments and joys. Plot is sacrificed to intellectual truth.

This is what Britton means when he speaks of 'the truth', and his ideology of the overarching importance of this truth in his writing is similar to B. S. Johnson's observations on the relationship between writing and 'life': 'Life does not tell stories. Life is chaotic, fluid, random; it leaves myriads of ends untied, untidily. Writers can extract a story from life only by strict, close selection, and this must mean falsification. Telling stories is really telling lies.'³ Britton too wanted to convey a similar chaos, fluidity and randomness; he was not interested in telling stories, but in telling the truth as he saw it.

Hunger and Love, then, is in many ways a modernist work, or at least an outsider modernist work, which is directly intended to reveal the thoughts of its outsider

protagonist. Mainstream modernist techniques are the means by which Britton conveys these thoughts, but the aesthetic is different: as a work of outsider modernism it has a political agenda, which is to vilify the middle-class status quo. The book has many qualities: the vividness of its detail, the power of the expression of the narrator's anger, and a number of perhaps surprisingly poetical passages. Many such pieces stand out as modernist in construction, such as the passage in which Arthur Phelps walks home down Putney Hill with its musical expression and its cinematic use of words, all blending into a criticism of the status quo; equally vivid is the paragraph when Arthur is forced out of his home, with its revelation of the workings of his mind when tying his belongings together; and also of note is the scene in which the reified he-Arthur of the world of trade becomes ontologically transformed into the self-contained you-Arthur.

The narrator's anger is the anger of the outsider or the alienated individual, of someone who does not belong because to belong means to accept the lie that the bourgeois option is the only possible one. Arthur is alienated first of all because he is a member of the working classes, and one of the lowest groups within those classes; but he is also alienated from his own class because he does not accept his position, and even worsens his situation by educating himself out of his class to the extent that virtually no one in his class can understand him, although he in turn appears not to want to understand them. A notable instance of Arthur's alienation is in the longest sentence in the book, with its lack of definite articles and reduced punctuation, expressing anger with the world of trade, capitalism being the enemy as opposed to the co-operation of socialism or anarchism. Significantly, though, Britton *does* belong to a much wider group of outsiders beyond the working classes, such as writers representing minority groups such as homosexuals, non-whites, and independent women.

³ B. S. Johnson, *Aren't You Rather Young to Be Writing your Memoirs?* (London: Hutchinson, 1973), p. 14.

Many works of outsider literature culminate in a vision of utopia, usually in the far future: working-class novels often envisage a socialist or communist utopia, and novels, such as those mentioned above, written by feminists, homosexuals or non-whites, for example, often look forward to a future in which there is complete tolerance of their particular minority group. *Brain* examines the failure of a kind of anarchist utopia, and the play depicts the execution of the ideas broached in *Hunger and Love*, only via the very unusual medium of science fiction drama. Ultimately, through criticism of society as it was then, and through hope for the future, a new society is envisaged.

To exclude Lionel Britton from discussions of internal working-class literature is a serious omission. It would be far more encouraging for *Hunger and Love* in particular to join the large number of other re-publications that have recently been made in this area. And it would perhaps be almost as encouraging to see a critical biography of Britton, and even the appearance of his later written unpublished works, all of which are held at the Lionel Britton Collection at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. Lionel Britton's voice belongs to working-class fiction and is in many ways unique to the sub-genre: it has, at the very least, as much right to be heard as the other voices expressed in the recovery of the literature.

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APPENDIX

Hunger and Love: The Chapter Titles and Numbers

Key:

TL Title list
TL(R) Title list revisions
TS Typescript
TS(R) Typescript revisions
Om. Omission
 < > Deletion

Below I list the chapter titles of different states of *Hunger and Love*. The first of each of the titles listed, contained within the closing square bracket, is that of the chapter of the FC as it appears on the chapter header; the chapter number precedes the title. The titles outside the bracket apply to any variants of the chapter titles in earlier states of the novel, and where a state (*TL*, *TL(R)*, *TS* or *(TS(R))*) is identical to the FC, it is not included in the list. Britton provisionally numbered the 'Paradise' chapter (later re-titled 'Columbus of the Mind') '3a', and also omitted to re-number his chapters following the insertion of the final chapter he actually wrote, 'Romance and Reality', between Chapters 29 and 30, thereby giving two chapters numbered '30' in both the *TL(R)* and the *TS*. For these reasons, I have numbered the earlier chapters below in accordance with their true sequence, using square brackets from Chapter 3a (now [4]) onwards. Where more than one chapter title and number is given with the FC this is usually because Britton has created one or more divisions from within the chapters of the earlier states. All significant punctuation differences have been included.

- 1 The Rat Comes Out of his Hole]
Poetry, Pot'erbs and Smells *TL*
- 2 Mind-Mining] Mind Mining *TL*
- 3 The Sack] *Om. TS* The Sack.<And
Paradise> *TS(R)*
- 4 Columbus of the Mind] [4] *Om. TS*
- 5 Dust 6 Come and Kiss Me] [5] Come
and Kiss Me *TL Om. TS* Come and Kiss
Me *TS(R)*
- 7 Nose Drip and Knowledge] [6] x and y
TL Om. TS x and y *TS(R)*
- 8 Into the Night] [7] *Om. TS* <One Day
Girls (etc.)> The Other World *TS(R)*
- 9 A Song of Sixpence] [8] *Om. TS* <Sing
a>A Song of Sixpence *TS(R)*
- 10 Mind Where you Tread] [9] Mind
Where you Tread..... *TL Om. TS* Mind
where you Tread! *TS(R)*
- 11 The Space-Time Franchise] [10] *Om.
TS*
- 12 A Couple o' Bob] [11]
- 13 Knackered] [12] Where we Stand *TL*
Where we stand *TS*
- 14 Love in the Lavatory] [13] W. C. *TL
Om. TS* W.C. *TS(R)*
- 15 Second Order Differences] [14] Being
Artful *TL Om. TS* Being artful *TS(R)*
- 16 The Timescape] [15]
- 17 Gap] [16] *Om. TS*
- 18 Pilf] [17] *Om. TS*
- 19 Fourth Dimension] [18] The Fourth
Dimension *TL Om. TS* The Fourth Dimension
TS(R)
- 20 That—is Life] [19] That, – is life *TL Om.
TS* That, – is life *TS(R)*
- 21 The Gentle Dust from Heaven] [20] Four
foot per century *TL Om. TS* Four foot per
century *TS(R)*
- 22 A Bit of Cant] [21]
- 23 Off the Chain] [22] One Damn thing after
another *TL Om. TS* One damn thing after
another *TS(R)*
- 24 Contact] [23]
- 25 The Recipe for Greatness] [24] How it is
done *TL Om. TS* How it is done *TS(R)*
- 26 Raison d'Etre] [25] If I had Dreams to sell
TL <If I had Dreams to sell> *TS(R)*
- 27 Why?] [26] Dans cette galère *TL Om. TS*
Dans cette galère *TS(R)*
- 28 Criterion] [27] *Om. TS*
- 29 The Electric Torch of Diogenes] [28] *Om.
TS*
- 30 Lamp-Post Sniffing] [29] *Om. TS*
- 31 All Balls 32 Unidimensional—or Super-
Dimensional? 33 Sinister] [30] Sinister *TL*
Sinister *TS*
- 34 Romance and Reality] [31]
- 35 What Evolution is Up to] [32] Hunger &
Love *TL* <Hunger & Love>Rolls through all
things *TL(R) Om. TS* <Hunger and Love>
Rolls through all things. *TS(R)*
- 36 The Origin of Will 37 The Human 38
Belly and Sex-Organ] [33] Hunger &

Love *TL* Hunger and Love *TS*

39 The Mass Production of Genius] [34]

40 Lost 41 The Relativity of the Ego]
[35] Relativity of the Ego *TL*

42 Towards Infinity] [36] *Om. TL*